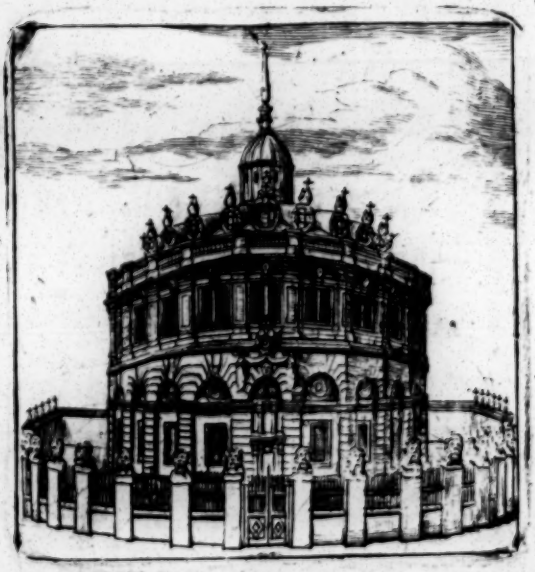
THE
Lively Oracles given to us.
OR
The Christians Birth-right and Duty, in the custody and use of the
HOLY SCRIPTURE.

By the Author of the WHOLE DUTY OF MAN, &c.

Richard Allestree. Supposed author

Search the Scriptures, Jo. 5. 39.



At the THEATER in OXFORD, 1678.

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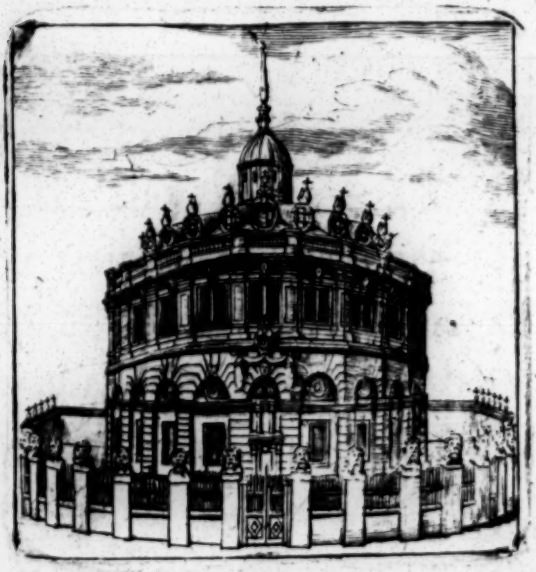

At the THEATER in OXFORD, 1678.

THE PREFACE.

IN the Treatiſe of the Government of the Tongue publiſht by me heretofore, I had occaſion to take notice among the exorbitances of that unruly part, which ſets on fire the whole courſe of nature, and its ſelf is ſet on fire from hell, *Jam.* 3. 6. *of the impious vanity prevailing in this Age, whereby men play with ſacred things, and exerciſe their wit upon thoſe Scriptures by which they ſhall* be judg'd at the laſt day, *Joh.* 12. 48.

But that holy Book not only ſuffering by the petulancy of the Tongue, but the malice of the heart, out of the abundance whereof the mouth ſpeaks, *Mat.* 12. 34. *and alſo from that irreligion, prepoſſeſſion, and ſupineſs, which the purſuit of ſenſual*

ſual pleſures certainly produces; the miſchief is too much diffus'd, and deeply rooted, to be controul'd by a few caſual reflections. I have therefore thought it neceſſary, both in regard of the dignity and importance of the ſubject, as alſo the prevalence of the oppoſition, to attemt a profeſt and particular vindication of the holy Scriptures, by diſplaying their native excellence and beauty; and enforcing the veneration and obedience that is to be paid unto them.

This I deſign'd to do in my uſual method, by an addreſs to the affections of the Reader; ſoliciting the ſeveral paſſions of love, hope, fear, ſhame and ſorrow, which either the majeſty of God in his ſublime being, his goodneſs deriv'd to us, or our ingratitude return'd to him, could actuate in perſons not utterly obdurate.

But whereas men, when they have learnt

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to do amiſs, quickly diſpute and dictate; I found my ſelf concern'd to paſs ſomtimes within the verge of controverſy, and to diſcourſe upon the principles of reaſon, and deductions from Teſtimony, which in the moſt important tranſactions of human life are juſtly taken for evidence. In which whole performance I have ſtudied to avoid the entanglements of Sophiſtry, and the ambition of unintelligible quotations; and kept my ſelf within the reach of the unlearned Chriſtian Reader; to whoſe uſes, my labors have bin ever dedicated.

All that I require, is that men would bring as much readineſs to entertain the holy Scriptures, as they do to the reading profane Authors; I am aſham'd to ſay, as they do to the incentives of vice and folly, nay, to the libels and invectives that are levell'd againſt the Scriptures.

If I obtain this, I will make no doubt

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that I ſhall gain a farther point; that from the peruſal of my imperfect conceptions, the Reader will proceed to the ſtudy of the Scriptures themſelves: there taſt and ſee how gracious the Lord is, *Pſ.* 34. 8. *and as the Angel commanded Saint* John, *Rev.* 10. 9. eat the Book; *where he will experimentally find the words of* David *verified*, Pſ. 19. 7. The Law of the Lord is an undefiled Law, converting the ſoul: the teſtimony of the Lord is ſure, and giveth wiſdom to the ſimple. The Statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light to the eies. The fear of the Lord is clean and endureth for ever, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be deſir'd are they then gold, yea, then much fine gold; ſweeter alſo then hony and the hony-comb. More-

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over by them is thy ſervant taught, and in keeping of them there is great reward.

It is ſaid of Moſes, *Ex.* 34. 29. *that having receiv'd the Law from God, and converſt with him in Mount* Sina *forty daies together, his face ſhone, and had a brightneſs fixt upon it that dazled the beholders; a pledg and ſhort eſſay not only of the appearance at Mount* Tabor, Mat. 17. 1. *where at the Transfiguration he again was ſeen in glory: but of that greater, and yet future change when he ſhall ſee indeed his God* face to face, *and ſhare his glory unto all eternity. The ſame divine Goodneſs gives ſtill his Law to every one of us. Let us receive it with due regard and veneration; converſe with him therein, inſtead of forty daies, during our whole lives; and ſo anticipate and certainly aſſure our intereſt in that great Transfiguration,*

when all the faithful ſhall put off their mortal fleſh, be tranſlated from glory to glory, *eternally behold their God*, ſee him as he is, *and ſo enjoy him.*

Converſation has every where an aſſimilating power, we are generally ſuch as are the men and Books, and buſineſs that we deal with: but ſurely no familiarity has ſo great an influence on Life and Manners, as when men hear God ſpeaking to them in his Word. That Word which the Apoſtle, Heb. 4. 12. *declares to* be quick and powerful, ſharper then any two-edg'd ſword, piercing even to the dividing aſunder of ſoul and ſpirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a diſcerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The time will come when all our Books however recommended, for ſubtilty of diſcourſe, exactneſs of method, variety of matter, or eloquence of Language; when all

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our curious Acts, *like thoſe mention'd* Act. 19. 19. ſhall be brought forth, and burnt before all men: *When the great Book of nature, and* heaven it ſelf ſhall depart as a ſcroul roll'd together, *Rev.* 6. 14. *At which important ſeaſon 'twill be more to purpoſe, to have ſtudied well, that is, tranſcrib'd in practice this one Book, then to have run thro all beſides*, for then the dead ſmall and great ſhall ſtand before God, and the Books ſhall be open'd, and another Book ſhall be open'd which is the Book of Life, and the dead ſhall be judg'd out of thoſe things which were written in the Books, according to their works, *Rev.* 20. 12.

In vain ſhall men allege the want of due conviction, that they did not know how penal it would be, to diſregard the Sanctions of Gods Law, which they would have had enforc'd by immediat miracle; the appari-

apparition of one ſent from the other world, who might teſtify of the place of torment. *This expectation the Scripture charges every where with the guilt of temting* God, *and indeed it really involves this inſolent propoſal, that the Almighty ſhould be oblig'd to break his own Laws, that men might be prevail'd with to keep his. But ſhould he think fit to comply herein, the condeſcention would be as ſucceſsleſs in the event, as 'tis unreaſonable in the offer. Our Savior aſſures,* that they who hear not *Moſes* and the Prophets, *the inſtructions and commands laid down in holy Scripture, would not be wrought upon by any other method,* would not be perſwaded, *by that which they allow for irreſiſtible conviction,* tho one roſe again from the dead, *Luke* 16. 31.

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THE LIVELY ORACLES GIVEN TO US,

Or the Christians Birth-right and Duty in the custody and use of the HOLY SCRIPTURE.

SECT. I.

The several Methods of Gods communicating the knowledg of himself.

GOD, as he is invisible to human eies, so is he unfathomable by human understandings; the perfection of his nature, and the impotency of ours, setting us at too great a distance to have any clear perception of him. Nay, so far are we from a full comprehension, that we can discern nothing at all of him, but by his own light; those discoveries he hath bin pleas'd to make of himself.

2. THOSE have bin of several sorts; The first was by infusion in mans creation, when

God interwove into mans very conſtitution and being the notions and apprehenſions of a Deity: and at the ſame inſtant when he breath'd into him a living ſoul, impreſt on it that native religion, which taught him to know and reverence his Creator, which we may call the inſtinct of humanity. Nor were thoſe principles dark and confus'd, but clear and evident, proportionable to the ends they were deſign'd to, which were not only to contemplate the nature, but to do the will of God; practice being even in the ſtate of innocence preferrable before an unactive ſpeculation.

3. BUT this Light being ſoon eclips'd by *Adams* diſobedience, there remain'd to his benighted poſterity, only ſom faint glimmerings, which were utterly inſufficient to guide them to their end, without freſh aids, and renew'd manifeſtations of God to them. It pleas'd God therefore to repair this ruine, and by frequent revelations to communicate himſelf to the Patriarchs in the firſt Ages of the World; afterwards to Prophets, and other holy men; till at laſt he reveled himſelf yet more illuſtrioſly *in the face of Jeſus Chriſt*, 2 Cor. 4. 6.

4. THIS is the one great comprehenſive Revelation wherein all the former were involv'd, and to which they pointed; the whole myſtery of Godlineſs being compris'd in this of

of *Gods* being *manifeſted in the fleſh*, and the conſequents thereof. 1 Tim. 3. 16. whereby our Savior as he effected our reconciliation with God by the ſacrifice of his death; ſo he declar'd both that, and all things elſe that it concern'd man to know in order to bliſs, in his doctrin and holy life. And this *Teacher* being not only *ſent from God*, Jo. 3. but being himſelf God bleſſed for ever; it cannot be that his inſtructions can want any ſupplement. Yet that they might not want atteſtation neither to the incredulous world; he confirm'd them by the repeted miracles of his life, and by the teſtimony of thoſe who ſaw the more irrefragable conviction of his Reſurrection and Aſcenſion. And that they alſo might not want credit and enforcement, the holy Spirit ſet to his ſeal, and by his miraculous deſcent upon the Apoſtles, both aſſerted their commiſſion, and enabled them for the diſcharge of it, by all gifts neceſſary for the propagating the Faith of Chriſt over the whole World.

5. THESE were the waies by which God was pleaſed to revele himſelf to to the Forefathers of our Faith, and that not only for their ſakes, but ours alſo, to whom they were to derive thoſe divine dictats they had receiv'd. Saint *Stephen* tells us, thoſe under the Law *receiv'd the lively Oracles* to deliver down to their poſterity, *Acts 7. 38.* And thoſe un-

der the Goſpel, who receiv'd yet more lively Oracles, from him who was both the Word and the Life, did it for the like purpoſe; to tranſmit it to us upon whom the ends of the world are come. By this all need of repeted Revelations is ſuperſeded, the faithful deriving of the former, being ſufficient to us for *all things that pertain to life and godlineſs*, 2 Pet. 1. 3.

6. And for this, God (whoſe care is equal for all ſucceſſions of men) hath graciouſly provided, by cauſing Holy Scriptures to be writ; by which he hath deriv'd on every ſucceeding Age the illuminations of the former. And for that purpoſe endowed the Writers not only with that moral fidelity requiſite to the truth of Hiſtory, but with a divine Spirit, proportionable to the great deſign of fixing an immutable rule for Faith and Manners. And to give us the fuller ſecurity herein, he has choſen no other penmen of the New Teſtament, then thoſe who were the firſt oral Promulgers of our Chriſtian Religion; ſo that they have left to us the very ſame doctrin they taught the Primitive Chriſtians; and he that acknowledges them divinely inſpir'd in what they preach'd, cannot doubt them to be ſo in what they writ. So that we all may injoy virtually and effectively that wiſh of the devout Father, who deſir'd to be Saint *Pauls* Auditor: for he that

that hears any of his Epiſtles read, is as really ſpoke to by Saint *Paul*, as thoſe who were within the ſound of his voice. *Thus God who in times paſt ſpake at ſundry times, and in diverſe manners to our Fathers by the Prophets, and in the later daies by his ſon,* Heb. 1. 1, 2. continues ſtill to ſpeak to us by theſe inſpir'd Writers; and what Chriſt once ſaid to his Diſciples in relation to their preaching, is no leſs true of their writings: *He that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me,* Luk. 10. 16. All the contemt that is at any time flung on theſe ſacred Writings, rebounds higher, and finally devolves on the firſt Author of thoſe doctrins, whereof theſe are the Regiſters and Tranſcripts.

7. BUT this is a guilt which one would think peculiar to Infidels and Pagans, and not incident to any who had in their Baptiſm liſted themſelves under Chriſts banner: yet I fear I may ſay, of the two parties, the Scripture has met with the worſt treatment from the later. For if we meſure by the frequency and variety of injuries, I fear Chriſtians will appear to have out-vied Heathens: Theſe bluntly disbelieve them, neglect, nay perhaps ſcornfully deride them. Alas, Chriſtians do this and more; they not only put contemts, but tricks upon the Scripture, wreſt and diſtort it to juſtify all their wild phancies, or ſecular deſigns; and ſuborn its Patronage to thoſe things it forbids, and tells us that God abhors.

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8. INDDED ſo many are the abuſes we offer it, that he that conſiders them would ſcarce think we own'd it for the words of a ſenſible man, much leſs of the great omniſcient God. And I believe 'twere hard to aſſign any one ſo comprehenſive and efficacious cauſe of the univerſal depravation of manners, as the diſvaluing of this divine Book, which was deſign'd to regulate them. It were therefore a work worthy another inſpired writing, to attemt the reſcue of this, and recover it to its juſt eſtimate. Yet alas, could we hope for that, we have ſcoffers who would as well deſpiſe the New as the Old; and like the Huſbandmen in the Goſpel, *Mat. 21. 36.* would anſwer ſuch a ſucceſſion of meſſages by repeting the ſame injuries.

9. TO ſuch as theſe 'tis I confeſs vain for man to addreſs; nay 'twere inſolence to expect that human Oratory ſhould ſucceed where the divine fails; yet the ſpreading infection of theſe renders it neceſſary to adminiſter antidotes to others. And beſides, tho (God be bleſt) all are not of this form, yet there are many who, tho not arriv'd to this contemt, yet want ſom degrees of that juſt reverence they owe the ſacred Scriptures, who give a confus'd general aſſent to them as the word of God, but afford them not a conſideration and reſpect anſwerable to ſuch an acknowledgment. To ſuch as theſe, I ſhall hope

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it may not be utterly vain to attemt the exciting of thoſe drowſy notions that lie unactive in them, by preſenting to them ſom conſiderations concerning the excellence and uſe of the Scripture: which being all but neceſſary conſequences of that principle they are ſuppoſed to own, *viz.* that they are Gods word, I cannot much queſtion their aſſent to the ſpeculative part: I wiſh I could as probably aſſure my ſelf of the practic.

10. Indeed were there nothing elſe to be ſaid in behalf of holy Writ, but that it is Gods word, that were enough to command the moſt awful regard to it. And therefore it is but juſt we make that the firſt and principal conſideration in our preſent diſcourſe. But then 'tis impoſſible that that can want others to attend it; ſince whatſoever God ſaies, is in all reſpects completely good. I ſhall therefore to that of its divine original add ſecondly the conſideration of its ſubject Matter; thirdly, of its excellent and no leſs diffuſive end and deſign; and fourthly, of its exact propriety and fitneſs to that deſign, which are all ſuch qualifications, that where they concur, nothing more can be requir'd to commend a writing to the eſteem of rational men. And upon all theſe teſts, notwithſtanding the cavil of the Romaniſts and others, whoſe force we ſhall examin with the unhappy iſſue of contrary counſels, this law of God will

will be found to answer the Psalmists character of it, *Ps.* 19. 7. *The Law of God is perfect*; and 'twill appear that the custody and use thereof, is the Birth-right and Duty of every Christian. All which severals being faithfully deduced; it will only remain that I add such cautions as will be necessary to the due performance of the aforesaid duty; and our being in som degree render'd perfect, as this Law of God, and the Author thereof himself is perfect; *Mat.* 5. 48.

SECT.

SECT. II.

The divine Original, Endearments, and Authority of the Holy Scripture.

MENS judgments are ſo apt to be biaſt by their affections, that we often find them readier to conſider who ſpeaks, then what is ſpoken: a temper very unſafe, and the principle of great injuſtice in our inferior tranſactions with men; yet here there are very few of us that can wholly diveſt our ſelves of it, whereas, when we deal with God (in whom alone an implicit faith may ſecurely be repoſed) we are nice and wary, bring our ſcales and meſures, will take nothing upon his word which holds not weight in our own balance. 'Tis true, he needs not our partiality to be *juſtified in his ſayings*, Pſal. 51. 4. *His words are pure, even as the ſilver tried ſeven times in the fire*, Pſal. 12. 6. able to paſs the ſtricteſt teſt that right reaſon (truly ſo called) can put them to. Yet it ſhews a great perverſeneſs in our nature, that we who ſo eaſily reſign our underſtandings to fallible men, ſtand thus upon our guard againſt God; make him diſpute for every inch he gains on us; nor will afford him what we daily grant

to any credible man, to receive an affirmation upon trust of his veracity.

2. I am far from contradicting our Saviour's Precept, of *Search the Scriptures*, Jo. 7. or Saint *Pauls*, of *proving all things*, 1 Thes. 5. 21. we cannot be too industrious in our inquest after truth, provided we still reserve to God the decisive vote, and humbly acquiesce in his sense, how distant soever from our own; so that when we consult Scripture (I may add reason either) 'tis not to resolve us whether God be to be believed or no in what he has said, but whether he hath said such and such things: for if we are convinc'd he have; reason as well as Religion commands our assent.

3. WHATEVER therefore God has said, we are to pay it a reverence merely upon the account of its Author; over and above what the excellence of the matter exacts: and to this we have all inducements as well as obligation: there being no motives to render the words of men estimable to us, which are not eminently and transcendently appliable to those of God.

4. THOSE motives we may reduce to four: first, the Autority of the Speaker; secondly, his Kindness; thirdly, his Wisdom; and fourthly, his Truth. First, for that of Autority; that may be either native, or acquired; the native is that of a parent, which is such a charm

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of obſervance, that we ſee *Solomon*, when he would impreſs his counſels, aſſumes the perſon of a Father; *Hear O my children the inſtructions of a Father*, Prov. 4. 1. And generally thro that whole Book he uſes the compellation of my Son, as the greateſt endearment to engage attention and reverence. Nay ſo indiſpenſible was the obligation of children in this reſpect, that we ſee the contumacious child that would not hearken to the advice of his Parents, was by God himſelf adjudged to death, *Deut. 21. 20.*

5. NOR have only Gods, but mens Laws exacted that filial reverence to the dictats of Parents. But certainly no Parent can pretend ſuch a title to it as God, who is not only the immediat Father of our perſons, but the original Father of our very nature; not only of our fleſh, but of our ſpirits alſo, *Heb. 12. 9.* So that the Apoſtles Antitheſis in that place is as properly applied to counſels as corrections; and we may as rightly infer, that if we give reverence to the advices of our earthly Parents, *much more ought we ſubject our ſelves to this Father of our ſpirits.* And we have the very ſame reaſon wherewith to enforce it: for *the Fathers of our fleſh do* as often dictate, as *correct according to their own pleſures*; preſcribe to their children not according to the exact meſures of right and wrong, but after that humor which moſt pre-

dominates in themselves. But God alwaies directs his admonitions to our profit, *that we may be partakers of his holiness*, Heb. 12. 11. So that we are as unkind to our selves, as irreverent towards him, whenever we let any of his words fall to the ground; whose claim to this part of our reverence is much more irrefragable then that of our natural Parents.

6. BUT besides this native Autority there is also an acquired; and that we may distinguish into two sorts; the one of dominion, the other of reputation, To the first kind belongs that of Princes, Magistrates, Masters, or any that have coercive power over us. And our own interest teaches us not to slight the words of any of these, who can so much to our cost second them with deeds. Now God has all these titles of jurisdiction; He is the great King, *Ps.* 48. 2. Nor was it only a complement of the Psalmists; for himself owns the stile, *I am a great King*, Mal. 1. *He is the Judg of all the World*; Gen. 18. yea, that *Ancient of daies*, before whom the Books were open'd, *Dan.* 7. 10. He is our Lord and Master by right, both of Creation and Redemtion; and this Christ owns even in his state of inanition; yea, when he was about the most servile imploiment; the washing his Disciples feet: when he was most literally in the form of a servant; yet he scruples not to assert his right to that opposite title; *You call me Master, and*

and Lord; and ye ſay well, for ſo I am; Jo. 13. Nor are theſe emty names, but effectively attended with all the power they denote. Yet ſo ſtupid are we, that whilſt we awfully receive the dictates of our earthly Superiors, we ſlight and neglect the Oracles of that God who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. When a Prince ſpeaks, we are apt to cry out with *Herods* Flatterers, *the voice of a God, and not of a man,* Act. 12. Yet when it is indeed the voice of God, we chuſe to liſten to any thing elſe rather then it. But let us ſadly remember, that notwithſtanding our contemts, this word ſhall (as our Savior tells us) *judg us at the laſt day,* Jo. 12. 48.

7. A ſecond ſort of acquir'd Autority is that of reputation. When a man is famed for ſom extraordinary excellencies, whether moral or intellectual, men come with appetite to his diſcourſes, greedily ſuck them in, nor need ſuch a one beſpeak attention; his very name has don it for him, and prepoſſeſt him of his Auditors regard. Thus the Rabbies among the Jews, the Philoſophers among the Greeks, were liſtened to as Oracles, and to cite them was (by their admiring Diſciples) thought a concluding Argument. Nay, under Chriſtianity, this admiration of mens perſons has bin ſo inordinate, that it has crumbled Religion away in little inſignificant parties; whilſt not only *Paul*, *Apollo*, or *Cephas*,

Cephas, but names infinitly inferior, have become the diſtinctive characters of Sects and ſeparate Communions. So eaſily alas are we charm'd by our prepoſſeſſions, and with itching ears run in queſt of thoſe doctrins which the fame of their Authors, rather then the evidence of truth, commend to us.

8. And hath God don nothing to get him a repute among us? has he no excellencies to deſerve our eſteem? is he not worthy to preſcribe to his own creatures? If we think yes, why is he the only perſon to be diſregarded? or why do we ſo unſeaſonably depart from our own humor, as not to give his Word a reverence proportionable to that we pretend for him; nay, which we actually pay to men of like paſſions with our ſelves? A contemt ſo abſurd as well as impious, that we have not the example of any the moſt barbarous people to countenance us. For tho ſom of them have made very wild miſtakes in the choice of their Deities, yet they have all agreed in this common principle, that whatever thoſe Deities ſaid, was to be receiv'd with all poſſible veneration; yea, ſuch a deference gave they to all ſignifications of the divine will, that as they would undertake no great enterprize without conſulting their Auguries; ſo upon any inauſpicious ſigns they relinquiſht their attemts. And certainly if we had the ſame reverence for the true God which

which they had for the falſe, we ſhould as frequently conſult him. We may do it with much more eaſe and certainty: we need not truſt to the entrails of Beaſts, or motion of Birds: we need not go to *Delphos*, or the Lybian *Hammon* for the reſolving our doubts; but what *Moſes* ſaid to *Iſrael* is very applicable to us, *the Word is nigh thee*, Deut. 30. 14. That Word which *David* made his *Counſellor*, Pſal. 119. 24. his *Comforter*, ver. 50. his *Treſure*, ver. 72. his *Study* ver. 99. And had we thoſe awful apprehenſions of God which he had, we ſhould pay the like reverence to his Word. Did we well ponder how many titles of Autority he has over us, we ſhould ſurely be aſham'd to deny that reſpect to him in whom they all conſpire; which we dare not deny to them ſeparately in human Superiors.

9. A ſecond motive to eſteem mens words, is the kindneſs of the ſpeaker. This has ſuch a faſcinating power, as nothing but extreme ill nature can reſiſt. When a man is aſſur'd of the kindneſs of him that ſpeaks, whatever is ſpoken is taken in good part. This is it that diſtinguiſhes the admonitions of a friend from the reproches of an enemy; and we daily in common converſation receive thoſe things with contentment and applauſe from an intimate and familiar, which if ſpoken by a ſtranger or enemy would be

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deſpis'd or ſtomach'd. So inſinuating a thing is kindneſs, that where it has once got it ſelf believ'd, nothing it ſaies after is diſputed; it ſupples the mind, and makes it ductile and pliant to any impreſſions.

10. BUT what human kindneſs is there that can come in any competition with the Divine? it ſurpaſſes that of the neareſt and deareſt relations; *Mothers may forget, yet will I not forget thee*, Iſa. 49. 15. And the Pſalmiſt found it experimentally true, *When my Father and my Mother forſake me, the Lord taketh me up*, Pſ. 27. 10. The tendereſt bowels compared to his, are adamant and flint: ſo that 'tis a moſt proper epithet the Wiſe man gives him; *O Lord thou lover of ſouls*, Wiſ. 11. 26. Nor is this affection merely mental, but it atteſts it ſelf by innumerable effects. The effects of love are all reducible to two heads, doing and ſuffering; and by both theſe God has moſt eminently atteſted his love to us.

11. FOR the firſt, we cannot look either on our bodies or our ſouls, on the whole Univerſe about us, or that better World above us; but we ſhall in each ſee *the Lord hath don great things for us*, Pſal. 114. Nay, not only our enjoiments, but even the capacity to enjoy, is his bounty. Had not he drawn mankind out of his original clay, what had we bin concern'd in all the other works of his Creation? So that if we put any value either upon what

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we have or what we are, we cannot but account our ſelves ſo much indebted to this his active love. And tho the paſſive was not practicable by the divine Nature ſimply and apart, yet that we might not want all imaginable evidences of his love, he who was God bleſſed for ever, linkt his impaſſible to our paſſible nature; aſſum'd our humanity, that he might eſpouſe our ſorrows, and was born on purpoſe that he might die for us. So that ſure we may ſay in his own words, *greater love then this hath no man*, Jo. 15. 13.

12. And now 'tis very hard, if ſuch an unparallel'd love in God, may not as much affect us, as the ſlight benefactions of every ordinary friend; if it cannot ſo much recommend him to our regard, as to reſcue his word from contemt, and diſpoſe us to receive impreſſions from it; eſpecially when his very ſpeaking is a new act of his kindneſs, and deſign'd to our greateſt advantage.

13. But if all he has don and ſuffer'd for us cannot obtain him ſo much from us, we muſt ſurely confeſs, our diſingenuity is as ſuperlative as his love. For in this inſtance we have no plea for our ſelves. The diſcourſes of men, 'tis true, may ſomtime be ſo weak and irrational, that tho kindneſs may ſuggeſt pity, it cannot reverence: But this can never happen in God, whoſe wiſdom is as infinite as his love. He talks not at our vain rate who

often talk only for talkings ſake: but his words are directed to the moſt important ends, and addreſt in ſuch a manner as befits him in whom are *all the treſures of wiſdom and knowledg*, Col. 2. And this is our third conſideration, the wiſdom of the Speaker.

14. How attractive a thing Wiſdom is, we may obſerve in the inſtance of *the Queen of Sheba*, who *came from the utmoſt parts of the earth*, as Chriſt ſaies, Mat. 12. 42. *to hear the Wiſdom of Solomon.* And the like is noted of the Greek Sages, that they were addreſt to from all parts, by perſons of all ranks and qualities, to hear their Lectures. And indeed the rational nature of man do's by a kind of ſympathetic motion cloſe with whatever hath the ſtamp of reaſon upon it. But alas, what is the profoundeſt wiſdom of men, compar'd with that of God? He is the eſſential reaſon; and all that man can pretend to, is but an emanation from him; a ray of his Sun, a drop of his Ocean: which as he gives, ſo he can alſo take away. He can infatuate the moſt ſubtil deſigners; And (as he ſaies of himſelf) *makes the diviners mad; turns the wiſe men back, and makes their wiſdom fooliſhneſs*, Eſay 44. 25.

15. How impious a folly is it then in us, to Idolize human Wiſdom with all its imperfections, and deſpiſe the divine? yet this every man is guilty of, who is not attracted to the

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ſtudy of ſacred Writ by the ſupereminent wiſdom of its Author. For ſuch men muſt either affirm that God has not ſuch a ſupereminency; or that, tho he have in himſelf, he hath not exerted it in this writing: The former is down-right blaſphemy; and truly the later is the ſame, a little varied. For that any thing but what is exactly wiſe, can proceed from infinite wiſdom, is too abſurd for any man to imagin. And therefore he that charges Gods Word with defect of wiſdom, muſt interpretatively charge God ſo too. For tho 'tis true, a wiſe man may ſomtimes ſpeak fooliſhly; yet that happens thro that mixture of ignorance or paſſion, which is in the moſt knowing of mortals: but in God, who is a pure Act, and eſſential Wiſdom, that is an impoſſible ſuppoſition.

16. NAY, indeed it were to tax him of folly beyond what is incident to any ſenſible man, who will ſtill proportion his inſtruments to the work he deſigns. Should we not conclude him mad, that ſhould attemt to fell a mighty Oak with a Pen-knife, or ſtop a Torrent with a wiſp of Straw? And ſure their conceptions are not much more reverend of God, who can ſuppoſe that a writing deſign'd by him for ſuch important ends, as the *making men wiſe unto ſalvation*, 2 Tim. 3. 15 *the caſting down all that exalts it ſelf againſt the obedience of Chriſt*, 2 Cor. 10. 5. ſhould it ſelf be fooliſh

and weak: or that he should give it those great Attributes of being *sharper then a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow*, Heb. 4. 14. if its discourses were so flat and insipid, as som in this profane Age would represent them.

17. 'Tis true indeed, 'tis not, as the Apostle speaks, the *wisdom of this world*, 1 Cor. 2. 6. The Scripture teaches us not the arts of undermining Governments, defrauding and circumventing our brethren; but it teaches us that which would tend much more even to our temporal felicity; and as reason promts us to aspire to happiness, so it must acknowledg, that is the highest wisdom which teaches us to attain it.

18. And as the Holy Scripture is thus recommended to us by the wisdom of its Author; so in the last place is it by his truth, without which the other might rather raise our jealousy then our reverence. For wisdom without sincerity degenerates into serpentine guile; and we rather fear to be ensnar'd then hope to be advantag'd by it. The most subtil addresses, and most cogent arguments prevail not upon us, where we suspect som insidious design. But where wisdom and fidelity meet in the same person, we do not only attend, but confide in his counsels. And this qualification is most eminently in God. *The*

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children of men are deceitful upon the weights, Pſal. 62. 9. Much guile often lurks indiſcernibly under the faireſt appearances: but Gods veracity is as eſſentially himſelf, as his wiſdom, and he can no more deceive us, then he can be deceiv'd himſelf. *He is not man that he ſhould lie*, Num. 23. 19. He deſigns not (as men often do) to ſport himſelf with our credulity; and raiſe hopes which he never means to ſatisfy: *he ſaies not to the ſeed of* Jacob, *ſeek ye me in vain*, Ex. 45. 19. but all his *promiſes are yea and Amen*, 2 Cor. 1. 20. He is perfectly ſincere in all the propoſals he makes in his Word: which is a moſt rational motive for us to advert to it, not only with reverence but love.

19. AND now when all theſe motives are thus combined; the autority, the kindneſs, the wiſdom, the veracity of the ſpeaker, what can be requir'd more to render his words of weight with us? If this four-fold cord will not draw us, we have ſure the ſtrength, not of men, but of that Legion we read of in the Goſpel, *Mar. 5. 9.* For theſe are ſo much the cords of a man, ſo adapted to our natures, nay to our conſtant uſage in other things, that we muſt put off much of our humanity, diſclaim the common meſures of mankind, if we be not attracted by them. For I dare appeal to the breaſt of any ſober, induſtrious man, whether in caſe a perſon, who he were

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ſure had all the fore-mention'd qualifications, ſhould recommend to him ſom rules as infallible for the certain doubling, or trebling his eſtate, he would not think them worth the purſuing; nay, whether he would not plod and ſtudy on them, till he comprehended the whole Art. And ſhall we then when God in whom all thoſe qualifications are united, and that in their utmoſt tranſcendencies, ſhall we, I ſay, think him below our regard, when he propoſes the improving our intereſts, not by the ſcanty proportions of two or three; but in ſuch as he intimated to *Abraham*, when he ſhewed him the Stars, as the repreſentative of his numerous off-ſpring, *Gen. 15. 5.* when he teaches us that higheſt, and yet moſt certain Alchimy, of refining and multiplying our enjoiments, and then perpetuating them?

20. ALL this God do's in Scripture; and we muſt be ſtupidly improvident, if we will take no advantage by it. It was once the complaint of Chriſt to the Jews, *I am come in my Fathers name and ye receive me not, if another ſhall come in his own name, him ye will receive*, Jo. 5. 43. And what was ſaid by him the eternal eſſential Word, is no leſs applicable to the written; which coming in the name, and upon the meſſage of God, is deſpis'd and ſlighted, and every the lighteſt compoſure of men preferr'd before it. As if that ſignature

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of Divinity it carries, ſerved rather as a Brand to ſtigmatize and defame, then adorn and recommend it. A contemt which ſtrikes immediatly at God himſelf, whoſe reſentments of it, tho for the preſent ſuppreſt by his long-ſuffering, will at laſt break out upon all who perſevere ſo to affront him, in a *judgment worthy of God*, Wiſ. 12. 26.

21. BUT after all that has bin ſaid, I foreſee ſom may ſay, that I have all this while but beaten the air, have built upon a principle which ſom flatly deny, others doubt of, and have run away with a ſuppoſition that the Bible is of divine Original, without any attemt of proof. To ſuch as theſe I might juſtly enough object the extreme hard meſure they offer to Divinity above all other Sciences. For in thoſe, they ſtill allow ſom fundamental maxims, which are preſuppoſed without proof; but in this they admit of no *Poſtulata*, no granted principle on which to ſuperſtruct. If the ſame rigor ſhould be extended to ſecular caſes, what a damp would it ſtrike upon commerce? For example, a man expects fair dealing from his neighbor, upon the ſtrength of thoſe common notions of Juſtice he preſumes writ in all mens hearts: but according to this meſure, he muſt firſt prove to every man he deals with, that ſuch notions there are, and that they are obligatory: that the wares expos'd to ſale are his own; that dominion

nion is not founded in grace, or that he is in that ſtate, and ſo has a property to confer upon another; that the perſon dealt with, paies a juſt price; do's it in good mony; and that it is his own; or that he is in the ſtate of grace; or needs not be ſo, to juſtify his purchaſe: and at this rate the Market will be as full of nice queſtions as the Scholes. But becauſe complaints and retortions are the common refuge of cauſes that want better Arguments, I ſhall not inſiſt here; but to proceed to a defence of the queſtion'd Aſſertion, that the Bible is the Word of God.

22. In which I ſhall proceed by theſe degrees. Firſt, I ſhall lay down the plain grounds upon which Chriſtians beleive it. Secondly, I ſhall compare thoſe with thoſe of leſs credibility which have generally ſatisfied mankind in other things of the like nature. And thirdly, I ſhall conſider whether thoſe who are diſſatisfied with thoſe grounds, would not be equally ſo with any other way of atteſtation.

23. Before I enter upon the firſt of theſe, I deſire it may be conſider'd, that matters of fact are not capable of ſuch rigorous demonſtrative evidences, as mathematical propoſitions are. To render a thing fit for rational belief, there is no more requir'd, but that the motives for it do over-poiſe thoſe againſt it; and in that degree they do ſo, ſo is the belief ſtronger or weaker.

24. Now

24. NOW the motives of our belief in the preſent caſe, are ſuch as are extrinſic, or intrinſic to the Scriptures; of which the extrinſic are firſt, and preparative to the other; and indeed all that can reaſonably be inſiſted on to a gain-ſaier, who muſt be ſuppos'd no competent judg of the later. But as to the former, I ſhall adventure to ſay, that the divine Original of the Scripture hath as great grounds of credibility as can be expected in any thing of this kind. For whether God inſpir'd the Pen-men of Holy Writ, is matter of fact, and being ſo, is capable of no other external evidence but that of teſtimony: and that matter of fact being alſo in point of time ſo remote from us, can be judg'd of only by a ſeries of Teſtimonies deriv'd from that Age wherein the Scriptures were writen, to this: and the more credible the teſtifiers, and the more univerſal the Teſtimony; ſo much the more convincing are they to all conſidering men.

25. AND this atteſtation the Scripture hath in the higheſt circumſtances, it having bin witneſs'd to in all Ages, and in thoſe Ages by all perſons that could be preſum'd to know any thing of it. Thus the Old Teſtament was own'd by the whole Nation of the Jews, as the writings of men inſpir'd by God; and that with ſuch evidence of their miſſion, as abundantly ſatisfied thoſe of that Age, of their

being ſo inſpir'd; and they deriv'd thoſe Writings with that atteſtation to their poſterity. Now that thoſe of the firſt Ages were not deceiv'd, is as morally certain as any thing can be ſuppos'd. For in the firſt part of the Bible is contain'd the hiſtory of thoſe miracles wherewith God reſcued that people out of *Egypt*, and inſtated them in *Canaan*. Now if they who liv'd at that time knew that ſuch miracles were never don, 'tis impoſſible they could receive an evident Fable as an inſpir'd truth. No ſingle perſon, much leſs a whole Nation can be ſuppos'd ſo ſtupid. But if indeed they were eie-witneſſes of thoſe miracles, they might with very good reaſon conclude, that the ſame *Moſes* who was by God impower'd to work them, was ſo alſo for the relating them; as alſo all thoſe precedent events from the Creation down to that time, which are recorded by him.

26. So alſo for the preceptive parts of thoſe Books, thoſe that ſaw thoſe formidable ſolemnities, with which they were firſt publiſh'd, had ſure little temtation to doubt that they were the dictats of God, when writen. Now if they could not be deceiv'd themſelves, 'tis yet leſs imaginable that they ſhould conſpire to impoſe a cheat upon their poſterities; nor indeed were the Jews of ſo eaſy a credulity, that 'tis at all probable the ſucceeding Generations would have bin ſo impos'd on:

on: their humor was ſtubborn enough, and the precepts of their Law ſevere and burdenſom enough to have temted them to have caſt off the yoak, had it not bin bound upon them by irreſiſtible convictions of its coming from God. But beſides this Tradition of their Elders, they had the advantage of living under a Theocracy, the immediat guidance of God; Prophets daily rais'd up among them, to fore-tell events, to admoniſh them of their duty, and reprove their backſlidings: yet even theſe gave the deference to the writen Word; nay, made it the teſt by which to try true inſpirations from falſe: *To the Law and to the Teſtimony; if they ſpeak not according to it, there is no light in them*, Eſay 8. 20. So that the veneration which they had before acquir'd, was ſtill anew excited by freſh inſpirations, which both atteſted the old, and became new parts of their Canon.

27. Nor could it be eſteem'd a ſmall confirmation to the Scriptures, to find in ſucceeding Ages the ſignal accompliſhments of thoſe prophecies which were long before regiſtred in thoſe Books; for nothing leſs then divine Power and Wiſdom could foretell, and alſo verify them. Upon theſe grounds the Jews univerſally thro all ſucceſſions receiv'd the Books of the Old Teſtament as divine Oracles, and lookt upon them as the greateſt truſt that could be committed to them:

and accordingly were ſo ſcrupulouſly vigilant in conſerving them, that their Maſorits numbred not only the ſections, but the very words, nay letters, that no fraud or inadvertency might corrupt or defalk the leaſt iota of what they eſteem'd ſo ſacred. A farther teſtimony and ſepiment to which, were the Samaritan, Chaldee, and Greek verſions: which being made uſe of in the Synagogs of Jews, in their diſperſions, and the Samaritans at *Sichem*, could not at thoſe diſtances receive a uniform alteration, and any other would be of no effect. Add to this, that the Original exemplar of the Law, was laid up in the Sanctuary, that the Prince was to have a Copy of it alwaies by him, and tranſcribe it with his own hand; that every Jew was to make it his conſtant diſcourſe and meditation, teach it his children, and wear part of it upon his hands and forehead. And now ſure 'tis impoſſible to imagin any matter of fact to be more carefully deduced, or irrefragably teſtified, nor any thing believ'd upon ſtronger evidence.

28. THAT all this is true in reference to the Jews, that they did thus own theſe Writings as divine, appears not only by the Records of paſt Ages, but by the Jews of the preſent, who ſtill own them, and cannot be ſuſpected of combination with the Chriſtians. And if theſe were reaſonable grounds of conviction

viction to the Jews, (as he muſt be moſt abſurdly ſceptical that ſhall deny) they muſt be ſo to Chriſtians alſo; who derive them from them: and that with this farther advantage to our Faith, that we ſee the clear completion of thoſe Evangelical prophecies which remain'd dark to them, and conſequently have a farther Argument to confirm us, that the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament are certainly divine.

29. THE New has alſo the like means of probation: which as it is a collection of the doctrin taught by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, muſt if truly related be acknowledged no leſs divine then what they orally deliver'd. So that they who doubt its being divine, muſt either deny what Chriſt and his Apoſtles preacht to be ſo; or elſe diſtruſt the fidelity of the relation: The former ſtrikes at the whole Chriſtian Faith; which if only of men, muſt not only be fallible, but is actually a deceit, whilſt it pretends to be of God, and is not. To ſuch Objectors we have to oppoſe thoſe ſtupendous miracles with which the Goſpel was atteſted; ſuch as demonſtrated a more then human efficacy. And that God ſhould lend his omnipotence to abet the falſe pretenſions of men, is a conceit too unworthy even for the worſt of men to entertain.

30. 'TIS true, there have bin by God permitted

mitted lying miracles; as well as true ones have bin don by him; Such as were those of the Magicians in *Egypt*, in opposition to the other of *Moses*; but then the difference between both was so conspicuous, that he must be more partial and disingenuous, then even those Magicians were, who would not acknowledg the disparity, and confess in those which were truly supernatural, *the finger of God*, Exod. 8. 19. Therefore both in the Old and New Testament it is predicted, that *false Prophets should arise, and do signs and wonders*, Deut. 13. 1. Mat. 24. 11. 24. as a trial of their fidelity who made profession of Religion; whether they would prefer the few and trivial sleights which recommended a deceiver, before those great and numberless miracles which attested the sacred Oracles deliver'd to the sons of men by the God of truth. Whether the trick of a *Barchochebas*, to hold fire in his mouth; that of *Marcus* the heretic, to make the Wine of the Holy Sacrament appear bloud; or that of *Mahomet*, to bring a Pidgeon to his ear, ought to be put in balance against all the miracles wrought by *Moses*, our Savior, or his Apostles. And in a word, whether the silly stories which *Iamblichus* solemnly relates of *Pythagoras*, or those *Philostratus* tells of *Apollonius Tyaneus*, deserve to rival those of the Evangelists. It is a most just judgment, and accordingly threatned by Almighty

Almighty God, that they who would *not obey the truth ſhould believe a lie*, 2 Theſ. 2. 11. But ſtill the Almighty, *where any man* or devil *do's proudly, is* evidently *above him*, Exod. 18. 11. *will be juſtified in his ſayings, and be clear when he is judged*, Rom. 3. 4.

31. BUT if men will be Sceptics, and doubt every thing, they are to know that the matter call'd into queſtion, is of a nature that admits but two waies of ſolution; probability, and teſtimony. Firſt for probability, let it be conſider'd, who were the firſt promulgers of Chriſts miracles. In his life time they were either the patients on whom his miracles were wrought, or the common people, that were ſpectators: the former, as they could not be deceiv'd themſelves, but muſt needs know whether they were cur'd or no; ſo what imaginable deſign could they have to deceive others? Many indeed have pretended impotency as a motive of compaſſion; but what could they gain by owning a cure they had not? As for the Spectators, as their multitude adds to their credibility; (it being morally impoſſible that ſo many ſhould at once be deluded in a matter ſo obvious to their ſenſes) ſo do's it alſo acquit them from fraud and combination. Cheats and forgeries are alwaies hatcht in the dark, in cloſe Cabals, and privat Junctо's. That five thouſand men at one time, and four thouſand at another, ſhould conſpire

conſpire to ſay, that they were miraculouſly fed, when they were not; and all prove true to the fiction, and not betray it: is a thing as irrational to be ſuppos'd, as impoſſible to be parallel'd.

32. BESIDES, admit it poſſible that ſo many could have join'd in the deceit, yet what imaginable end could they have in it? Had their lie bin ſubſervient to the deſigns of ſom potent Prince that might have rewarded it, there had bin ſom temtation: but what could they expect from the reputed ſon of a Carpenter, who had not himſelf where to lay his head? Nay, who diſclaim'd all ſecular power; convei'd himſelf away from their importunities, when they would have forc'd him to be a King: And conſequently, could not be lookt on as one that would head a Sedition, or attemt to raiſe himſelf to a capacity of rewarding his Abettors. Upon all theſe conſiderations, there appears not the leaſt ſhadow of probability; that either thoſe particular perſons who publiſh'd the cures they had receiv'd, or thoſe multitudes who were witneſſes and divulgers of thoſe, or his other miracles; could do it upon any ſiniſter deſign, or indeed upon any other motive but gratitude and admiration.

33. IN the next place, if we come to thoſe miracles which ſucceeded Chriſts death, thoſe moſt important, and convincing, of his Re-

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ſurrection and Aſcenſion, and obſerve who were the divulgers of thoſe, we ſhall find them very unlikely to be men of deſign; a ſet of illiterate men, taken from the Fiſher-boats, and other mean occupations: and ſuch as needed a miracle as great as any of thoſe they were to aſſert (the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt) to fit them for their office. What alas could they drive at, or how could they hope that their teſtimony could be received, ſo much againſt the humor and intereſt of the preſent rulers; unleſs they were aſſur'd not only of the truth of the things, but alſo of ſom ſupernatural aids to back and fortify them? Accordingly we find, that till they had receiv'd thoſe; till by the deſcent of the holy Ghoſt they were *endued with power from on high*, Luk. 24. 49. they never attemted the diſcovery of what they had ſeen: but rather hid themſelves, kept all their aſſemblies in privacy and concealment *for the fear of the Jews*, Jo. 20. 19. and ſo were far enough from projecting any thing beſide their own ſafety. Afterwards, when they began to preach, they had early eſſays, what their ſecular advantages would be by it; theatnings and revilings, ſcourgings and impriſonments, *Act.* 4. 20. 5. 18. 40. And can it be imagined, that men who a little before had ſhewed themſelves ſo little in love with ſuffering, that none of them durſt ſtick to their Maſter at his appeehenſion, but

one forſwore, and all forſook him; can it, I ſay, be imagin'd that theſe men ſhould be ſo much in love with their own Fable, as to venture all ſorts of perſecution for the propagating it? Or if they could, let us in the next place conſider what probability there could be of ſucceſs.

34. THEIR preaching amounted to no leſs then the Deifying of one, whom both their Roman and Jewiſh Rulers, nay, the generality of the people had executed as a malefactor: ſo that they were all engag'd, in defence of their own Act, to ſift their teſtimony with all the rigor that conſcious jealouſy could ſuggeſt. And where were ſo many concern'd inquiſitors, there was very little hope for a forgery to paſs. Beſides the avow'd diſpleſure of their Governors made it a hazardous thing to own a belief of what they aſſerted. Thoſe that adher'd to them could not but know, that at the ſame time they muſt eſpouſe their dangers and ſufferings. And men uſe not to incur certain miſchiefs, upon doubtful and ſuſpicious grounds.

35 YET farther, their doctrin was deſign'd to an end to which their Auditors could not but have the greateſt reluctancy: they were to ſtruggle with that rooted prepoſſeſſion which the Jews had for the Moſaical Law, which their Goſpel out-dated; and the Gentiles for the Rites and Religion of their Anceſtors;

ceſtors; and, which was harder then either, with the corruptions and vices of both: to plant humility and internal ſanctity, ſo contrary to that ceremonial holineſs, upon which the Jews ſo valued themſelves, and deſpis'd others: and Temperance, Juſtice, and Purity, ſo contrary to the practice, nay, even the religion of the Heathen: and to attemt all this with no other allurement, no other promiſe of recompence but what they muſt attend in another world, and paſs too thro reproches and afflictions, torments and death. Theſe were all ſuch invincible prejudices, as they could never hope to break thro with a lie, nay, which they could not have encounter'd even with every common truth, but only with that, which being divine, brought its aids with it; without which 'twas utterly impoſſible for all the skill or oratory of men to overcome ſuch diſadvantages.

36. AND yet with all theſe did theſe rude inartificial men conteſt, and that with ſignal ſucceſs: no leſs then three thouſand Proſelytes made by Saint *Peters* firſt Sermon; and that in *Jeruſalem*, the Scene where all was acted, and conſequently where 'twas the moſt impoſſible to impoſe a forgery. And at the like miraculous rate they went on, till as the Phariſees themſelves complain, they had *filled Jeruſalem with their doctrin*, Acts 5.28. nor did *Judea* ſet bounds to them; *their ſound went*

out into all nations, Rom. 10. 18. and their doctrin spred it self thro all the Gentile world.

37. And sure so wonderful an event, so contrary to all human mesures, do's sufficiently evince there was more then man in it. Nothing but the same creative Power that produc'd light out of darkness, could bring forth effects so much above the proportion of the cause. Had these weak instruments acted only by their natural powers, nothing of this had bin atchiev'd. Alas, could these poor rude men learn all Languages within the space of fifty daies, which would take up almost as many years of the most industrious Student? And yet had they not bin able to speak them, they could never have divulg'd the Gospel to the several Nations, nor so effectually have convinc'd the by-standers, *Act.* 2. that they acted by a higher impulse. Yet to convince the world they did so, they repeted their Masters miracles as well as his doctrin; heal'd the sick, cast out devils, rais'd the dead; And where God communicated so much of his power, we may reasonably conclude he did it to promote his own work, not the work of the Devil, as it must have bin if this whole Scene were a lie.

38. When all this is weigh'd, I presume there will remain little ground to suspect, that the first planters of Christian Faith had any

any other deſign then what they avowed, *viz.* the bringing men to holineſs here, and ſalvation hereafter. The ſuſpicion therefore, if any, muſt reſt upon later times; and accordingly ſom are willing to perſuade themſelves and others, that the whole Scheme of our Religion, is but a lately devis'd Fable to keep the world in awe; whereof Princes have made ſom uſe, but Clergy-men more; and that Chriſt and his Apoſtles are only actors whom themſelves have conjured up upon the ſtage to purſue their plot.

39. IN anſwer to this bold, this blaſphemous ſuggeſtion, I ſhould firſt deſire theſe ſurmiſers to point out the time when, and the perſons who began this deſign; to tell us exactly whence they date this politic Religion, as they are pleas'd to ſuppoſe it. If they cannot, they are manifeſtly unjuſt to reject our account of it when they can give none themſelves; and fail very much of that rigid demonſtration they require from others. That there is ſuch a profeſſion as Chriſtianity in the world, is yet (God be bleſt) undeniable; (tho at the rate it has of late declin'd, God knows how long it will be ſo:) we ſay it came by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and that it is atteſted by an uninterrupted teſtimony of all the intervening Ages, the ſuffrage of all Chriſtian Churches from that day to this. And ſure they who embraced the doctrin, are the moſt

moſt competent witneſſes from whence they received it.

40. YET leſt they ſhould be all thought parties to the deſign, and their witneſs excepted againſt, it has pleaſed God to give us collateral aſſurances, and made both Jewiſh and Gentile Writers give teſtimony to the Antiquity of Chriſtianity. *Joſephus* do's this, lib. 20. chap. 8. and lib. 18. chap. 4. where, after he has given an account of the crucifixion of Chriſt exactly agreeing with the Evangeliſts; he concludes, *And to this day the Chriſtian people, who of him borrow their name, ceaſe not to increaſe.* I add not the perſonal elogium which he gives of our Savior; becauſe ſom are ſo hardy to controul it: alſo I paſs what *Philo* mentions of the religious in *Egypt*, becauſe ſeveral Learned men refer it to the Eſſens, a Sect among the Jews, or ſom other. There is no doubt of what *Tacitus* and other Roman Hiſtorians ſpeak of Chriſt as the Author of the Chriſtian doctrin; which it had bin impoſſible for him to have don, if there had then bin no ſuch doctrin, or if Chriſt had not bin known as the Founder of it. So afterward *Plinie* gives the Emperor *Trajan* an account both of the manners, and multitude of the Chriſtians; and makes the innocence of the one, & the greatneſs of the other, an Argument to ſlacken the perſecution againſt them. Nay, the very bloody Edicts of

of the perſecuting Emperors, & the ſcoffs and reproches of *Celſus*, *Prophyrie*, *Lucian*, and other profane oppoſers of this Doctrin, do undeniably aſſert its being. By all which it appears, that Chriſtianity had in thoſe Ages not only a being, but had alſo obtain'd mightily in the world, and drawn in vaſt numbers to its profeſſion; and vaſt indeed they muſt needs be, to furniſh out that whole Army of Martyrs, of which profane, as well as Eccleſiaſtic writers ſpeak. And if all this be not ſufficient to evince that Chriſtianity ſtole not clancularly into the world, but took its riſe from thoſe times and perſons it pretends, we muſt renounce all faith of teſtimony, and not believe an inch farther then we ſee.

41. I ſuppoſe I need ſay no more to ſhew that the Goſpel, and all thoſe portentous miracles which atteſted it, were no forgeries, or ſtratagems of men. I come now to that doubt which more immediatly concerns the Holy Scripture, *viz.* whether all thoſe tranſactions be ſo faithfully related there, that we may believe them to have bin dictated by the ſpirit of God. Now for this, the proceſs need be but ſhort, if we conſider who were the penmen of the New Teſtament; even for the moſt part the Apoſtles themſelves: *Matthew*, and *John* who wrote two of the Goſpels, were certainly ſo: and *Mark*, as all the Ancients aver, was but the Amanuenſis to Saint *Peter*.

who

who dictated that Gospel. Saint *Luke* indeed comes not under this first rank of Apostles; yet is by som affirm'd to be one of the seventy Disciples: however an Apostolical person 'tis certain he was, and it was no wonder for such to be inspired. For in those first Ages of the Church men acted more by immediat inflation of the Spirit then since. And accordingly we find *Stephen*, tho but a Deacon, had the power of miracles; and preacht as divinely as the prime Apostles, *Act.* 7. And the gift of the Holy Ghost was then a usual concomitant of conversion, as appears in the Story of *Cornelius*, Acts 10. 45, 46. Besides, Saint *Luke* was a constant attendant on Saint *Paul* (who derived the Faith *not from man, but by the* immediat *revelation of Jesus Christ*, as himself professes, *Gal.* 1. 12.) and is by som said to have wrote by dictat from him, as *Mark* did from Saint *Peter*. Then as to the Epistles they all bear the names of Apostles, except that to the Hebrews, which yet is upon very good grounds presum'd to be Saint *Pauls*. Now these were the persons commissionated by Christ to preach the Christan doctrin, and were signally assisted in the discharge of that office; so that as he tells them, it was *not they who spake, but the spirit of the Father that spake in them*, Mat. 13. 11. And if they spake by divine inspiration, there can be no question that they wrote so also. Nay, indeed of the

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two, it ſeems more neceſſary they ſhould do the later. For had they err'd in any thing they orally deliver'd, they might have retracted and cured the miſchief: but theſe Books being deſign'd as a ſtanding immutable rule of Faith and Manners to all ſucceſſions, any error in them would have bin irreparable, and have entail'd it ſelf upon poſterity: which agreed neither with the truth, nor goodneſs of God to permit.

42. NOW that theſe Books were indeed writ by them whoſe names they bear, we have as much aſſurance as 'tis poſſible to have of any thing of that nature, and that diſtance of time from us. For however ſom of them may have bin controverted; yet the greateſt part have admitted no diſpute, whoſe doctrins agreeing exactly with the others, give teſtimony to them. And to the bulk of thoſe writings, it is notorious that the firſt Chriſtians receiv'd them from the Apoſtles, and ſo tranſmitted them to the enſuing Ages, which receiv'd them with the like eſteem and veneration. *They cannot be corrupted*, ſaies Saint *Auſtin* in the thirty ſecond Book againſt *Fauſtus* the Manich. c. 16. *becauſe they are and have bin in the hands of all Chriſtians. And whoſoever ſhould firſt attemt an alteration, he would be confuted by the inſpection of other ancienter Copies. Beſides, the Scriptures are not in ſom one Language, but tranſlated into many: ſo that the*

faults of one Book would be corrected by others more ancient, or in a different Tongue.

43. AND how much the body of Chriſtians were in earneſt concern'd to take care in this matter, appears by very coſtly evidences; multitudes of them chuſing rather to part with their lives then their Bibles. And indeed 'tis a ſufficient proof, that their reverence of that Book was very avowed and manifeſt; when their heathen Perſecuters made that one part of their perſecution. So that as wherever the Chriſtian Faith was receiv'd, this Book was alſo, under the notion we now plead for, *viz.* as the writings of men inſpir'd by God: ſo it was alſo contended for even unto death; and to part with the Bible was to renounce the Faith. And now, after ſuch a cloud of teſtimonies, we may ſure take up that (ill-applied) ſaying of the high Prieſt, *Mat. 26. 65. what farther need have we of witneſſes.*

44. YET beſides theſe, another ſort of witneſſes there are, I mean thoſe intrinſic evidences which ariſe out of the Scripture it ſelf; but of theſe I think not proper here to inſiſt, partly becauſe the ſubject will be in a great degree coincident with that of the ſecond general conſideration; and partly becauſe theſe can be argumentative to none who are not qualified to diſcern them. Let thoſe who doubt the divine Original of Scripture, well digeſt the former grounds which are within

within the verge of reaſon; and when by thoſe they are brought to read it with due reverence, they will not want Arguments from the Scripture it ſelf to confirm their veneration of it.

45. IN the mean time, to evince how proper the former diſcourſe is to found a rational belief that the Scripture is the word of God; I ſhall compare it with thoſe meſures of credibility upon which all human tranſactions move, and upon which men truſt their greateſt concerns without diffidence or diſpute.

46. THAT we muſt in many things truſt the report of others, is ſo neceſſary, that without it human ſociety cannot ſubſiſt. What a multitude of ſubjects are there in the world, who never ſaw their Prince, nor were at the making of any Law? if all theſe ſhould deny their obedience, becauſe they have it only by hear-ſay, there is ſuch a man, and ſuch Laws, what would become of government? So alſo for property, if nothing of teſtimony may be admitted, how ſhall any man prove his right to any thing? All pleas muſt be decided by the ſword, and we ſhall fall into that ſtate (which ſom have phancied the primitive) of univerſal hoſtility. In like manner for traffic and commerce; how ſhould any Merchant firſt attemt a trade to any foreign part of the world, if he did not be-

lieve that ſuch a place there was? and how could he believe that, but upon the credit of thoſe who have bin there? Nay indeed how could any man firſt attemt to go but to the next Market Town, if he did not from the report of others, conclude that ſuch a one there was? ſo that if this univerſal diffidence ſhould prevail, every man ſhould be a kind of *Plantagnus*, fixt to the ſoil he firſt ſprung up in. The abſurdities are indeed ſo infinite, and ſo obvious, that I need not dilate upon them.

47. BUT it will perhaps be ſaid, that in things that are told us by our contemporaries, and that relate to our own time, men will be leſs apt to deceive us, becauſe they know 'tis in our power to examin and diſcover the truth. To this I might ſay, that in many inſtances it would ſcarce quit coſt to do ſo; and the inconveniences of trial would exceed thoſe of belief. But I ſhall willingly admit this probable Argument, and only deſire it may be applied to our main queſtion, by conſidering whether the primitive Chriſtians who receiv'd the Scripture as divine, had not the ſame ſecurity of not being deceiv'd, who had as great opportunities of examining, and the greateſt concern of doing it throly, ſince they were to engage not only their future hopes in another world, but (that which to nature is much more ſenſible) all

all their preſent enjoiments, and even life it ſelf upon the truth of it.

48. BUT becauſe it muſt be confeſt that we who are ſo many Ages remov'd from them, have not their means of aſſurance, let us in the next place conſider, whether an aſſent to thoſe teſtimonies they have left behind them, be not warranted by the common practice of mankind in other caſes. Who is there that queſtions there was ſuch a man as *William* the Conqueror in this Iſland? or, to lay the Scene farther, who doubts there was an *Alexander*, a *Julius Cæſar*, an *Auguſtus*? Now what have we to found this confidence on beſides the faith of Hiſtory? And I preſume even thoſe who exact the ſevereſt demonſtrations for Eccleſiaſtic Story, would think him a very impertinent Sceptic that ſhould do the like in theſe. So alſo, as to the Authors of Books; who diſputes whether *Homer* writ the Iliads, or *Virgil* the Æneids, or *Cæſar* the Commentaries, that paſs under their names? yet none of theſe have bin atteſted in any degree like the Scripture. 'Tis ſaid indeed, that *Cæſar* ventured his own life to ſave his Commentaries, imploying one hand to hold that above the water, when it ſhould have aſſiſted him in ſwiming. But who ever laid down their lives in atteſtation of that, or any human compoſure, as multitudes of men have don for the Bible?

49. BUT

49. BUT perhaps 'twill be ſaid, that the ſmall concern men have, who wrote theſe, or other the like Books, inclines them to acquieſce in the common opinion. To this I muſt ſay, that many things inconſiderable to mankind have oft bin very laboriouſly diſcuſt, as appears by many unedifying Volumes, both of Philoſophers and Schole-men. But whatever may be ſaid in this inſtance, 'tis manifeſt there are others, wherein mens real and greateſt intereſts are intruſted to the teſtimonies of former Ages. For example, a man poſſeſſes an eſtate which was bought by his great Grand-father, or perhaps elder Progenitor: he charily preſerves that deed of purchaſe, and never looks for farther ſecurity of his title: yet alas, at the rate that men object againſt the Bible, what numberleſs Cavils might be raiſ'd againſt ſuch a deed? How ſhall it be known that there was ſuch a man as either Seller or Purchaſer? if by the witneſſes, they are as liable to doubt as the other; it being as eaſy to forge the Atteſtation as the main writing: and yet notwithſtanding all theſe poſſible deceits, nothing but a poſitive proof of forgery can invalidate this deed. Let but the Scripture have the ſame meſure, be allowed to ſtand in force, to be what it pretends to be, till the contrary be (not by ſurmiſes and poſſible conjectures) but by evident proof evinc'd; and its greateſt Advocats will ask no more.

50. A like inſtance may be given in public concerns: the immunities and rights of any Nation, particularly here, of our *Magna Charta*, granted many Ages ſince, and depoſited among the public Records: to make this ſignify any thing, it muſt be taken for granted, that this was without falſification preſerved to our times; yet how eaſy were it to ſuggeſt that in ſo long a ſucceſſion of its keepers, ſom may have bin prevail'd on by the influence of Princes to abridg and curtail its conceſſions; others by a prevailing faction of the people to amplify and extend it? Nay, if men were as great Sceptics in Law, as they are in Divinity, they might exact demonſtrations that the whole thing were not a forgery. Yet, for all theſe poſſible ſurmiſes, we ſtill build upon it, and ſhould think he argued very fallaciouſly, that ſhould go to evacuate it, upon the force of ſuch remote ſuppoſitions.

51. Now I deſire it may be conſider'd whether our ſecurity concerning the holy Scripture be not as great, nay, greater then it can be of this. For firſt, this is a concern only of a particular Nation, and ſo can expect no foreign atteſtation; and ſecondly, it has all along reſted on the fidelity of its keepers; which has bin either a ſingle perſon, or at beſt ſom ſmall number at a time; whereas the Scriptures have bin witneſs'd to by perſons of all Nations, and thoſe not ſingle, but collective

ctive Bodies and Societies, even as many as there have bin Christian Churches throout the world. And the same that are its Attestors have bin its Guardians also, and by their multitudes made it a very difficult, if not an impossible thing to falsify it in any considerable degree; it being not imaginable, as I shew'd before from St. *Austin*, all Churches shall combine to do it: and if they did not, the fraud could not pass undetected: and if no eminent change could happen, much less could any new, any counterfeit Gospel be obtruded, after innumerable Copies of the first had bin translated into almost all Languages, and dispersst throout the world.

52. The Imperial Law compil'd by *Justinian*, was soon after his death, by reason of the inroads of the *Goths*, and other barbarous Nations, utterly lost in the Western world; and scarce once heard of for the space of five hundred years, and then came casually to be retriv'd upon the taking of *Amalfis* by the Pisans, one single Copy being found there at the plundering of the City. And the whole credit of those Pandects, which have ever since govern'd the Western world, depends in a manner on that single Book, formerly call'd the *Pisan*; and now, after that *Pisa* was taken by the Florentines, the Florentine Copy. But notwithstanding this; the body of the Civil Law obtains; and no man thinks it reasonable

able to queſtion its being really what it pretends to be, notwithſtanding its ſingle, and ſo long interrupted derivation. I might draw this parallel thro many other inſtances, but theſe may ſuffice to ſhew, that if the Scripture might find but ſo much equity, as to be tried by the common meſures of other things, it would very well paſs the teſt.

53. BUT men ſeem in this caſe ('like our late Legiſlators) to ſet up new extraregular Courts of Juſtice, to try thoſe whom no ordinary rules will caſt, yet their deſigns require ſhould be condemn'd: And we may conclude, 'tis not the force of reaſon, but of prejudice, that makes them ſo unequal to themſelves as to reject the Scripture, when they receive every thing elſe upon far weaker grounds. The bottom of it is, they are reſolv'd not to obey its Precepts; and therefore think it the ſhorteſt cut to diſavow its autority: for ſhould they once own that, they would find themſelves intangled in the moſt inextricable dilemma; that of the Phariſees about *John Baptiſt: If we ſay from heaven, he will ſay, why then did you not believe him?* Mat. 21. 25. If they confeſs the Scriptures divine, they muſt be ſelf-condemn'd in not obeying them. And truly men that have ſuch preingagements to their luſts, that they muſt admit nothing that will diſturb them; do but prevaricate when they call for greater evidences

and demonstrations: for those bosom Sophisters will elude the most manifest convictions; and like Juglers, make men disbelieve even their own senses. So that any other waies of evidence will be as disputable with them, as those already offer'd: which is the third thing I proposed to consider.

54. It has bin somtimes seen in popular mutinies, that when blanks have bin sent them, they could not agree what to ask: and were it imaginable that God should so far court the infidelity of men, as to allow them to make their own demands, to set down what waies of proof would perswade them; I doubt not there are many have obstinacy enough, to defeat their own methods, as well as they now do Gods. 'Tis sure there is no ordinary way of conviction left for them to ask, God having already (as hath also bin shew'd) afforded that. They must therefore resort to immediat revelation, expect instant assurances from heaven, that this Book we call the Bible is the word of God.

55. My first question then is, in what manner this revelation must be made to appear credible to them. The best account we have of the several waies of revelation is from the Jews, to whom God was pleas'd upon new emergencies signally to revele himself. These were first dreams; secondly, visions; by both which the Prophets received

ved their inſpirations. Thirdly, *Vrim* and *Thummim*. Fourthly, the *Bath-col* (as they term it) Thunder and voice from Heaven. Let us conſider them diſtinctly, and ſee whether our Sceptical men may not probably find ſomwhat to diſpute in every one of theſe. And firſt for dreams; it is among us ſo hard to diſtinguiſh between thoſe that ariſe from conſtitution, prepoſſeſſion of phancy, diabolical, or divine infuſion, that thoſe that have the moſt critically conſider'd them, do rather difference them by their matter, then any certain diſcriminating circumſtances: and unleſs we had ſom infallible way of diſcerning, our dependence on them, may more probably betray then direct us. 'Tis unqueſtionable that uſually phancy has the greateſt ſtroke in them. And if he that ſhould commit himſelf to the guidance of his waking phancy, is not like to be over-wiſely govern'd, what can we expect from his ſleeping? All this and more may doubtleſs be ſoberly enough objected againſt the validity of our common dreams.

56. BUT admit there were now ſuch divine dreams as brought their evidence along with them; yet ſure 'tis poſſible for prejudic'd men, to reſiſt even the cleareſt convictions. For do we not ſee ſom that have made a ſhift to extinguiſh that natural light, thoſe notions which are interwoven into the very frame and conſtitution of their minds, that

ſo they may ſin more at eaſe, and without reluctancy? and ſure 'tis as poſſible for them to cloſe their eies againſt all raies from without too, to reſiſt revelation as well as inſtinct; and more likely, by how much a tranſient cauſe is naturally leſs operative then a permanent. An inſtance of this we have in *Balaam*, who being in theſe nightly viſitations prohibited by God to go to *Balack*; and tho he knew then, what he afterwards ſaies, *Num. 23. 19.* that *God was not a man that he ſhould lie, nor the ſon of man that he ſhould repent*; yet he would not take God at his firſt word, but upon a freſh bait to his covetouſneſs, tries again for an anſwer more indulgent to his intereſt. Beſides, if God ſhould thus revele himſelf to ſom particular perſons, yet 'tis beyond all preſident or imagination, that he ſhould do it to every man; and then how ſhall thoſe who have theſe dreams, be able to convince others that they are divine?

57. 'Tis eaſy to gueſs what reception a man that produces no other autority, would have in this ludicrous Age: he would certainly be thought rather to want ſleep, then to have had revelations in it. And if *Jacob* and the Patriarchs, who were themſelves acquainted with divine dreams, yet did not believe *Joſephs*; any man that ſhould now pretend in that kind, would be ſure to fall under the ſame irony that he did, to be entertain'd with

a *be-*

a *behold this dreamer cometh*, Gen. 37. 19.

58. The ſecond way of revelation by viſion was, where the man was wrapt into an extaſy, his ſpirit for a while ſuſpended from all ſenſible communication with the body, and entertain'd with ſupernatural light. In theſe the Prophets ſaw emblematical repreſentations of future events, receiv'd knowledg of divine Myſteries, and commiſſion and ability to diſcharge the whole prophetic office. Now ſuppoſe God ſhould now raiſe us Prophets, and inſpire them after this manner; what would the merry men of this time ſay to it? Can we think that they who rally upon all that the former Prophets have writ, would look with much reverence on what the new ones ſhould ſay? Som perhaps would conſtrue their raptures to be but like Mahomets Epilepſy; others a fit of frenzy, others perhaps a being *drunk with new wine*, Act. 2. 13. but thoſe that did the moſt ſoberly conſider it, would ſtill need a new revelation to atteſt the truth of this: there being far more convincing arguments to prove the Scriptures divine, then any man can allege to prove his inſpiration to be ſo. And 'tis ſure a very irrational method, to attemt the clearing of a doubt, by ſomwhat which is it ſelf more doubtful.

59. A third way, was by *Vrim* and *Thummim*, which Writers tell us was an Oracle reſulting from the Letters which were graven

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in the High Priests Pectoral, to which in all important doubts the Jews of those Ages resorted, and receiv'd responses; but whether it were by the suddain prominency, or resplendency of the letters, or by any other way, is not material in this place to enquire: one thing is certain, that the Ephod, and consequently the Pectoral was in the Priests custody, and that he had the administration of the whole affair. Now I refer it to consideration, whether this one circumstance would not (to those prejudic'd men I speak of) utterly evacuate the credit of the Oracle. They have taught themselves to look on Priest-hood, whether Legal or Evangelical, only as a better name for imposture and cosenage: and they that can accuse the Priests for having kept up a cheat for so many Ages, must needs think them such omnipotent Juglers, that nothing can be fence against their Legerdemain: and by consequence, this way of revelation would rather foment their displesure at the Ecclesiastics, then satisfy their doubts of the Scripture.

60. LASTLY, for the fourth way, that of thunder and voice from Heaven, tho that would be a signal way of conviction to unprejudiced men, yet it would probably have as little effect as the rest upon the others: men that pretend to such deep reasoning, would think it childish to be frighted out of their opinion

opinion by a clap of Thunder; ſom philoſophical reaſon ſhall be found out, to ſatisfy them that 'tis the effect only of ſom natural cauſe, and any the moſt improbable ſhall ſerve turn to ſupplant the fear of its being a divine teſtimony to that which they are ſo unwilling ſhould be true. As for the voice from Heaven, it muſt either be heard by others, and related to them; or elſe immediatly by themſelves: if the former, 'twill lie under the ſame prejudice which the Bible already do's: that they have it but by hear-ſay, and reporters would fall under the reproach either of deſign or frenzy; that they meant to deceive, or were themſelves deceiv'd by their own diſtemper'd phancy. But if themſelves ſhould be Auditors of it; 'tis odds but their bottomleſs jealouſies in divine Matters would ſuggeſt a poſſibility of fraud, tho they knew not how to trace it: nay 'tis more then poſſible that they will rather disbelieve their own ſenſes, then in this inſtance take their teſtimony with all its conſequences.

61. NOR is this a wild ſuppoſition: for we ſee it poſſible not only for ſingle men, but multitudes to disbelieve their ſenſes, thro an exceſs of credulity; witneſs the doctrin of Tranſubſtantiation. Why may it not then be as poſſible for others to do the like thro a greater exceſs of incredulity? Beſides, mens prepoſſeſſions and affections have a ſtrange influence

influence on their Faith: men many times will not ſuffer themſelves to believe the moſt credible things, if they croſs their inclination. How often do we ſee irregular patients that will not believe any thing thattheir appetite craves, will do them hurt, tho their Phyſicians, nay, their own even ſenſitive experience atteſt it to them? And can we think that a diſeas'd mind, gaſping with an Hydropic thirſt after the pleſures of ſin, will ever aſſent to thoſe premiſes, whoſe concluſion will engage to the renouncing them? Will not a luxurious voluptuous perſon be willing rather to give his ears the lie, to disbelieve what he hears, then permit them more deeply to diſoblige his other ſenſes, by bringing in thoſe reſtraints and mortifications which the Scripture would impoſe upon them?

62. THUS we ſee how little probability there is, that any of theſe waies of revelation would convince theſe incredulous men. And indeed, thoſe that will not believe upon ſuch inducements as may ſatisfy men of ſober reaſon, will hardly ſubmit to any other method, according to that Aſſertion of Father *Abraham; If they hear not* Moſes *and the Prophets, neither will they be perſwaded, tho one roſe from the dead*, Luk. 16. 31. Now at this rate of infidelity, what way will they leave God to manifeſt any thing convincingly to the world? which is to put him under an impo-

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potency greater then adheres to humanity: for we men have power to communicate our minds to others, tell whether to we own ſuch or ſuch a thing, to which we are intitled; and we can ſatisfy our Auditors that it is indeed we that ſpeak to them: but if every method God uſes, do's rather increaſe then ſatisfy mens doubts, all intercourſe between God and man is intercepted; and he muſt do that of neceſſity, which *Epicurus* phancied he did of choice; *viz.* keep himſelf unconcern'd in the affairs of mortals, as having no way of communicating with them. Nay (what is yet, if poſſible, more abſurd) he muſt be ſuppos'd to have put the works of his Creation out of his own reach, to have given men diſcourſive faculties, and left himſelf no way of addreſs to them.

63. THESE inferences how horridly ſoever they ſound, yet I ſee not how they can be diſclaim'd by thoſe, who are unſatisfied with all thoſe waies by which God hath hitherto revel'd himſelf to the world. For can it be imagin'd, that God who created man a reaſonable creature, that himſelf might be glorified in his free and rational obedience; (when all other creatures obey upon impulſe and inſtinct) can it, I ſay, be imagin'd, that he ſhould ſo remiſly purſue his own deſign, as to let ſo many Ages paſs ſince the Creation, and never to acquaint mankind with the

particulars werein that obedience was to be exercis'd. This ſure were ſo diſagreeable to his wiſdom and goodneſs, that it cannot be charg'd upon his will: and conſequently they who own not that he has made any ſuch revelation, muſt tacitly tax him of impotence, that he could not do it. But if any man will ſay he has, and yet reject all this which both Jews and Chriſtians receive as ſuch, let him produce his teſtimonies for the others, or rather (to retort his own meſure) his demonſtrations. And then let it appear whether his Scheme of doctrin, or ours, will need the greater aid of that eaſy credulity he reproches us with.

64. I have now gon thro the method I propoſed for evincing the Divine Original of the Scriptures, and ſhall not deſcend to examin thoſe more minute and particular Cavils which profane men make againſt them; the proof of this, virtually ſuperſeding all thoſe. For if it be reaſonable to believe it the Word of God, it muſt be reaſonable alſo to believe it of perfection proportionable to the Author; and then certainly it muſt be advanc'd beyond all our objections. For to thoſe who except to the ſtile, the incoherence, the contradictions or whatever elſe in Scripture; I ſhall only ask this one queſtion, whether it be not much more poſſible that they (who can pretend to be nothing above fallible

lible men) may misjudg, then that the infallible God ſhould dictate any thing juſtly liable to thoſe charges: I am ſure they muſt depart as much from Reaſon as Religion, to affirm the contrary. But alas, inſtead of this implicit ſubmiſſion to Gods Word, men take up explicit prejudices againſt it; condemn it without ever examining the truth of the Allegation. 'Tis certain, that in a writing of ſuch Antiquity, whoſe orignal Language has Idioms and Phraſes ſo peculiar, whoſe Country had cuſtoms ſo differing from the reſt of the world; 'tis impoſſible to judg of it without reference to all thoſe circumſtances. Add to this, that the Hebrew has bin a dead Language for well nigh two thouſand years, nowhere in common uſe: nor is there any other ancient Book now extant in it, beſides thoſe; yet not all neither, of the Old Teſtament.

65 Now of thoſe many who defame Holy Writ, how few are there that have the induſtry to inquire into thoſe particulars? And when for want of knowledg, ſom paſſages ſeem improper, or perhaps contradictory; the Scripture muſt bear the blame of their ignorance, and be accus'd as abſurd and unintelligible, becauſe themſelves are ſtupid and negligent. It were therefore methinks but a reaſonable propoſal, that no man ſhould arraign it, till they have uſed all honeſt diligence, taken in all probable helps for the un-

derstanding it: and if this might be obtain'd, I believe most of its Accusers would like those of the woman in the Gospel, *Jo. 8. 9.* drop away, as conscious of their own incompetency: the loudest out-cries that are made against it, being commonly of those who fall upon it only as a fashionable theme of discourse, and hope to acquire themselves the reputation of wits by thus charging God foolishly. But he that would candidly and uprightly endeavor to comprehend before he judges, and to that end industriously use those means which the providence of God by the labors of pious men hath afforded him, will certainly find cause to acquit the Scripture of those imputations which our bold Critics have cast upon it. I do not say that he shall have all the obscurities of it perfectly clear'd to him; but he shall have so many of them as is for his real advantage, and shall discern such reasons why the rest remain unfathomable, as may make him not only justify, but celebrate the wisdom of the Author.

66. YET this is to be expected only upon the fore-mention'd condition, *viz.* that he come with sincere and honest intentions; for as for him that comes to the Scripture with design, and wishes to find matter of cavil and accusations; there is little doubt but that spirit of impiety and profaness which sent him thither, will meet him there as a spirit of

of deluſion and occecation. That Prince of the Air will caſt ſuch miſts, raiſe ſuch black vapors; that as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *the light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt ſhall not ſhine unto him*, 2 Cor. 4. 5. Indeed were ſuch a man left only to the natural efficacy of prejudice, that is of it ſelf ſo blinding, ſo infatuating a thing, as commonly fortifies againſt all conviction. We ſee it in all the common inſtances of life; mens very ſenſes are often enſlav'd by it: the prepoſſeſſion of a ſtrong phancy will make the objects of ſight or hearing appear quite different from what they are. But in the preſent caſe, when this ſhall be added to Satanical illuſions, and both left to their operations by Gods with-drawing his illuminating grace, the caſe of ſuch a man anſwers that deſcription of the Scripture: *They have eies and ſee not, ears have they and hear not*, Rom. 11. 8. And that God will ſo withdraw his grace, we have all reaſon to believe; he having promis'd it only to the meek; to thoſe who come with malleable ductile ſpirits; to learn, not to deride or cavil. Saint *Peter* tells us, that the *unlearned and unſtable wreſt the Scripture to their own deſtruction*, 2 Pet. 3. 15. And if God permit ſuch to do ſo, much more will he the proud and malicious.

67. I ſay not this, to deter any from the ſtudy of Holy Scripture, but only to caution them to bring a due preparation of mind along

long with them; Gods Word being like a generous ſoveraign medicament; which if ſimply and regulary taken, is of the greateſt benefit; but if mixt with poiſon, ſerves only to make that more fatally operative. To conclude, he that would have his doubts ſolv'd concerning Scripture, let him follow the method our bleſſed Lord has deſcrib'd: Let him *do the will of God, and then he ſhall know of the doctrin, whether it be of God,* Jo. 7. 17. Let him bring with him a probity of mind, a willingneſs to aſſent to all convictions he ſhall there meet with: and then he will find grounds ſufficient to aſſure him that it is Gods Word, and conſequently to be receiv'd with all the ſubmiſſion and reverence, that its being ſo exacts.

SECT.

SECT. III.

The ſubject matter treated of in the Holy Scripture is excellent, as is alſo its end and deſign.

WE have hitherto conſider'd the holy Scripture only under one notion, as it is the Word of God; we come now to view it in the ſubject matter of it, the ſeveral parts whereof it conſiſts; which are ſo various and comprehenſive, as ſhews the whole is deriv'd from *him who is all in all*, 1 Cor. 19. 28. But that we may not ſpeak only looſely, and at rovers, we will take this excellent frame in pieces, and conſider its moſt eminent parts diſtinctly. Now the parts of Holy Writ ſeem to branch themſelves into theſe ſeverals. Firſt, the Hiſtorical; ſecondly, the Prophetic; thirdly, the Doctrinal; fourthly, the Preceptive; fifthly, the Minatory, ſixthly, the Promiſſory. Theſe are the ſeveral veins in this rich Mine, in which he who induſtriouſly labors, will find the Pſalmiſt was not out in his eſtimate, when he pronounces them *more to be deſir'd then gold, yea, then much fine gold*, Pſal. 19. 10.

2. TO ſpeak firſt of the Hiſtorical part; the

the things which chiefly recommend a Hiſtory are the dignity of the ſubject, the truth of the relation, and thoſe pleſant or profitable obſervations which are interwoven with it. And firſt, for the dignity of the ſubject, the Hiſtory of the Bible muſt be acknowledged to excel all others: thoſe ſhew the riſe and progreſs of ſom one people or Empire; this ſhews us the original of the whole Univerſe; and particularly of man, for whoſe uſe and benefit the whole Creation was deſign'd. By this mankind is brought into acquaintance with it ſelf; made to know the elements of its conſtitution, and taught to put a differing value upon that Spirit which was *breath'd into it by God, Gen. 2. 7.* and the fleſh whoſe *foundation is in the duſt,* Job 4. 19. And when this Hiſtorical part of Scripture contracts and draws into a narrow channel, when it records the concerns but of one Nation, yet it was that which God had dignified above all the reſt of the world, markt it out for his own peculiar; made it the repoſitory of his truth, and the viſible ſtock from whence the Meſſias ſhould come, in whom *all the Nations of the earth were to be bleſſed,* Gen. 18. 18. ſo that in this one people of the Jews, was virtually infolded the higheſt and moſt important intereſts of the whole world; and it muſt be acknowledg'd, no Story could have a nobler ſubject to treat of.

3. Se-

3. SECONDLY, as to the truth of the relation, tho to thoſe who own it Gods Word there needs no other proof; yet it wants not human Arguments to confirm it. The moſt undoubted ſymptom of ſincerity in an Hiſtorian is impartiality. Now this is very eminent in Scripture writers: they do not record others faults, and baulk their own; but indifferently accuſe themſelves as well as others. *Moſes* mentions his own diffidence and unwillingneſs to go on Gods meſſage, *Ex.* 4. 13. his provocation of God at the waters of *Meribah*, Num. 20. *Jonah* records his own ſullen behavior towards God, with as great aggravations as any of his enemies could have don. *Peter* in his dictating Saint *Mark's* Goſpel, neither omits nor extenuates his ſin; all he ſeems to ſpeak ſhort in, is his repentance. Saint *Paul* regiſters himſelf as the greateſt of ſinners.

4. AND as they were not indulgent to their own perſonal faults, ſo neither did any nearneſs of relation, any reſpect of quality bribe them to a concelement: *Moſes* relates the offence of his ſiſter *Miriam* in mutining. *Num.* 12. 1. of his brother *Aaron* in the matter of the Calf, *Ex.* 32. 4. with as little diſguiſe as that of *Korah* and his company. *David*, tho a King, hath his adultery and murder diſplaied in the blackeſt characters: and King *Hezekiahs* little vanity of ſhewing his

treſures, do's not eſcape a remark. Nay, even the reputation of their Nation could not biaſs the ſacred Writers; but they freely tax their crimes: the Iſraelites murmurings in the wilderneſs, their Idolatries in *Canaan*, are ſet down without any palliation or excuſe. And they are as frequently branded for their ſtubborneſs and ingratitude, as the Canaanites are for their abominations. So that certainly no Hiſtory in the world do's better atteſt its truth by this evidence of impartiality.

5. In the laſt place it commends it ſelf both by the pleſure and profit it yields. The rarity of thoſe events it records, ſurprizes the mind with a delightful admiration; and that mixture of ſage Diſcourſes, and well-coucht Parables wherewith it abounds, do's at once pleaſe and inſtruct. How ingenuouſly apt was *Nathans* Apologue to *David*, whereby with holy artifice he enſnar'd him into repentance? And it remains ſtill matter of inſtruction to us, to ſhew us with what unequal ſcales we are apt to weigh the ſame crime in others and our ſelves. So alſo that long train of ſmart calamities which ſucceeded his ſin, is ſet out with ſuch particularity, that it ſeems to be exactly the crime reverſt. His own luſt with *Bathſheba*, was anſwer'd with *Amnons* towards *Thamar*; his murder of *Vriah* with that of *Amnon*; his trecherous contrivance of

of that murder, with *Abſoloms* traiterous conſpiracy againſt him. So that every circumſtance of his puniſhment, was the very echo and reverberation of his guilt. A multitude of the like inſtances might be produc'd out of holy Writ; all concurring to admoniſh us, that God exactly marks, and will repay our crimes; and that commonly with ſuch propriety, that we need no other clue to guide us to the cauſe of our ſufferings, then the very ſufferings themſelves. Indeed innumerable are the profitable obſervations ariſing from the hiſtorical part of Scripture, that flow ſo eaſily and unconſtrain'd, that nothing but a ſtupid inadvertence in the reader can make him baulk them: therefore 'twould be impertinent here to multiply inſtances.

6. LET us next conſider the prophetic part of Scripture, and we ſhall find it no leſs excellent in its kind. The prophetic Books are for the moſt part made up (as the prophetic Office was) of two parts; prediction and inſtruction. When God rais'd up Prophets, 'twas not only to acquaint men with future events, but to reform their preſent manners: and therefore as they are called Seers in one reſpect, ſo they are Watch-men and Shepherds in another. Nay, indeed the former was often ſubſervient to the other as to the nobler end; their gift of fore-telling was to gain them autority, to be as it were the

ſeal of their commiſſion; to convince men that they were ſent from God: and ſo to render them the more pliant to their reproofs and admonitions. And the very matter of their prophecies was uſually adapted to this end: the denouncing of judgments being the moſt frequent theme, and that deſign'd to bring men to repentance; as appears experimentally in the caſe of *Nineveh*. And in this latter part of their office, the Prophets acted with the greateſt incitation and vehemence.

7. WITH what liberty and zeal do's *Elijah* arraign *Ahab* of *Naboths* murder, and foretel the fatal event of it, without any fear of his power, or reverence of his greatneſs? And *Samuel*, when he delivers *Saul* the fatal meſſage of his rejection, do's paſſionately and convincingly expoſtulate with him concerning his ſin, 1 *Sam.* 15. 17. Now the very ſame Spirit ſtill breaths in all the prophetic Writings: the ſame truth of prediction, and the ſame zeal againſt vice.

8. FIRST for the predictions, what ſignal completions do we find? How exactly are all the denunciations of judgments fulfil'd, where repentance has not interven'd? He that reads the 28. chap. of *Deut.* and compares it with the Jews calamities, both under the Aſſyrians and Babylonians, and eſpecially under the Romans, would think their oppreſſors

preſſors had conſulted it, and tranſcrib'd their ſeverities thence. And even theſe Nations, who were the inſtruments of accompliſhing thoſe diſmal preſages, had their own ruins foretold, and as punctually executed. And as in Kingdoms and Nations, ſo to private perſons none of the prophetic threatnings ever return'd emty. The ſentence pronounc'd againſt *Ahab*, *Jezebel*, and their poſterity, was fulfill'd even to the moſt minute circumſtances of place and manner; as is evident by comparing the denunciation of *Elijah*, 1 Kings 21. 19. 23. with their tragical ends recorded in the following chapters. And as for *Jehu*, whoſe ſervice God was pleaſed to uſe in that execution, tho he rewarded it with entailing the crown of *Iſrael* on him for four deſcents; yet he fore-told thoſe ſhould be the limits, and accordingly we find *Zachariah*, the fourth deſcendent of his line, was the laſt of it that ſate on that throne, 2 *Kings* 15. 10. So alſo the deſtruction of *Architophel* and *Judas*, the one immediat, the other many hundred years remote, are fore-told by *David*, Pſal. 109. and we find exactly anſwer d in the event.

9. NOR was this exactneſs confin'd only to the ſevere predictions, but as eminent in the more gracious. All the bleſſings which God by himſelf, or the Miniſtry of his Prophets promis'd, were ſtill infallibly made good.

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At the time of life God return'd and visited *Sarah* with conception, notwithstanding those natural improbabilities which made her not only distrust, but even deride and laugh at the promise, *Gen. 18.* The posterity of that Son of Promise, the whole race of *Abraham* was deliver'd from the Egyptian bondage, and possest of *Canaan*, at the precise time which God had long before signified to *Abraham*, Gen. 15. So likewise the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, was fore-told many years before their deportation, and *Cyrus* named for their restorer, before he had either name or being save only in Gods prescience, *Is.* 44. 28. But I need not multiply instances of national or personal promises. The earliest, and most comprehensive promise of all was that of the Messiah, in whom all persons and *Nations of the world were to be blest*, Gen. 22. 11. *that seed of the woman that should bruise the Serpents head*, Gen. 3. 15. *To him give all the Prophets witness*, as Saint *Peter* observes, *Acts* 10. And he who was the subject, made himself also the expounder of those prophecies in his walk to *Emmaus* with the two Disciples, *Lu.* 24. 13. *beginning at* Moses, *and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.*

10. THIS as it was infinitly the greatest blessing afforded mankind, so was it the most fre-

frequently and eminently predicted; and that with the moſt exact particularity as to all the circumſtances. His immaculate conception, the union of his two natures implied in his name *Immanuel; Behold a virgin ſhall conceive and bear a ſon, and ſhall call his name Immanuel;* is moſt plainly fore-told by *Iſ.* chap. 7. 14. Nay, the very place of his birth ſo punctually fore-told, that the Prieſts and Scribes could readily reſolve *Herods* queſtion upon the ſtrength of the Prophecy, and aſſure him Chriſt muſt be *born in Bethlehem*, Mat. 2. 5. As for the whole buſineſs and deſign of his life, we find it ſo deſcrib'd by *Iſaiah*, chap. 61. as Chriſt himſelf owns it, Luk. 4. 18. *The ſpirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe he hath appointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath ſent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovering of ſight to the blind, to ſet at liberty them that are bruiſed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

11. IF we look farther to his death, the greateſt part of the Old Teſtament has a direct aſpect on it. All the Levitical œconomy of Sacrifices and Ablutions were but prophetic Rites, and ocular Predictions of that one expiatory Oblation. Nay, moſt of Gods providential diſpenſations to the Jews, carried in them types and prefigurations of this. Their reſcue from *Egypt*, the ſprinkling

kling of blood to secure them from the destroying Angel; the Manna with which they were fed, the Rock which supplied them water: these and many more referr'd to Christ, as their final and highest signification.

12. BUT besides these darker adumbrations, we have (as the Apostle speaks) *a more sure word of prophecy*. Saint *Peter* in his calculation begins with *Moses*, takes in *Samuel*, and the whole succession of Prophets after him, as bearing witness to this great event of Christs passion, *Acts* 4. 22. 24. And indeed he that reads the Prophets considering, shall find it so punctually describ'd, that the Evangelists do not much more fully instruct him in the circumstances of it. *Daniel* tells us his death, as to the kind of it, was to be violent: *The Messiah shall be cut off*; and as to the design of it, 'twas *not for himself*, Dan. 9. 26. But the Prophet *Isaiah* gives us more then a bare negative account of it; and expressly saies, *he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was on him, and by his stripes we were healed*, chap. 53. 5. And again, ver. 10. *Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin*; and ver. 11. *my righteous Servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities*. Nor is, *Job* an Idumean, much short of even this Evangelical Prophet, in that short Creed of his, wherein he owns

owns him as his Redeemer, *I know that my Redeemer liveth, &c.* Job. 19. 25.

13. AND as the end, ſo the circumſtances of his ſufferings are moſt of them under prediction: His extenſion upon the Croſs is mention'd by the Pſalmiſt: *They pierced my hands, and my feet; I may tell all my bones*, Pſal. 22. 16. 17. As for his inward dolors, they are in that Pſalm ſo pathetically deſcribed, that Chriſt choſe that very form to breath them out in: *My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me?* ver. 1. So his revilers did alſo tranſcribe part of their reproches from ver. 8. *He truſted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him*, Mat. 27. 43. That vinegar which was offer'd him on the Croſs, was a completion of a prophecy; *In my thirſt they gave me vinegar to drink*, Pſ. 69. 21. the piercing of his ſide was expreſly fore-told by *Zachary; they ſhall look on him whom they have pierced*, *Zach. 10. 12.* The company in which he ſuffer'd, and the interment he had, are alſo intimated by *Iſaiah*: *he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death*, Iſai. 53. 9. Nay, even the diſpoſal of his garments was not without a prophecy: *they parted my garments among them, and upon my veſture did they caſt lots*, Pſ. 22. 18. Here are a cloud of witneſſes, which as they ſerve eminently to atteſt the truth of Chriſtian Religion; ſo do they to evince the excellency of ſacred Scri-

pture, as to the verity of the prophetic part.

14. As to the admonitory part of the prophetic Writings, they are in their kind no way inferior to the other. The reproofs are autoritative and convincing. What piercing exprobrations do we find of *Israels* ingratitude? How often are they upbraided with the better examples of the brute creatures? with the Ox and the Ass by *Isaiah*, chap. 1. 3. with the Stork and the Crane, and the Swallow, by *Jeremiah*, chap. 8. 7. Nay, the constancy of the Heathen to their false gods is instanc'd to reproch their revolt from the true. *Hath a Nation changed their gods which yet are no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit*, Jer. 2. 11. What awful, what majestic representations do we find of Gods power, to awake their dread! *Fear ye not me saith the Lord? will ye not tremble at my presence; who have placed the sand for the bounds of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass over: and tho the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; tho they roar, yet can they not pass over it?* Jer. 22. And again, *Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place*, Is. 57. 15. So we find him describ'd as *a God glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders*, Ex. 15. 11. These and many other the like heights of divine eloquence we meet

meet with in the prophetic Writings: which cannot but ſtrike us with an awful reverence of the divine Power.

15. NOR are they leſs pathetic in the gentler ſtrains. What inſtance is there of the greateſt tenderneſs and love, which God has not adopted to expreſs his by? He perſonates all the neareſt and moſt endearing relations: that of a Husband; *I will marry thee to my ſelf*, Hoſ. 2. 19. of a Father; *I am a Father to* Iſrael, *and* Ephraim *is my firſt born*: nay, he vies bowels with the tender ſex, and makes it more poſſible for a mother to renounce her *compaſſions towards the ſon of her womb*, then for him to with-draw his, *Iſa. 49. 15.* By all theſe endearments, theſe *cords of a man, theſe bands of love*, as himſelf ſtiles them, *Hoſ. 11. 4.* endeavoring to draw his people to their duty, and their happineſs. And when their perverſeneſs fruſtrates all this his holy Artifice; how paſſionately do's he expoſtulate with them? how ſolemnly proteſt his averſneſs to their ruin? *Why will ye die O houſe of* Iſrael? *for I have no pleſure in the death of him that dieth, ſaith the Lord God*, Ezek. 18. 31, 32. with what regrets and relentings do's he think of abandoning them? *How ſhall I give thee up* Ephraim? *how ſhall I deliver thee* Iſrael? *how ſhall I make thee as* Admah? *how ſhall I ſet thee as* Zeboim? *my heart is turn'd within me, my repentings are kindled together*;

Hoſ. 11. 8. In ſhort, 'twere endleſs to cite the places in theſe prophetic Books, wherein God do's thus condeſcend to ſolicit even the ſenſitive part of man; and that with ſuch moving Rhetoric, that I cannot but wonder at the exception ſom of our late Critics make againſt the Bible, for its defect in that particular: for Oratory is nothing but a dextrous application to the affections and paſſions of men. And certainly we find not that don with greater advantage any where then in ſacred Writ.

16. YET it was not the deſign of the Prophets (no more then of the Apoſtle) to take men with guile, *2 Cor. 12. 16.* to inveigle their affections unawares to their underſtandings; but they addreſs as well to their reaſons, make ſolemn appeals to their judicative faculties. And *now judg I pray between me and my vineyard*, ſaies *Iſa. 5. 3.* Nay, God by the Prophet *Ezekiel* ſolemnly pleads his own cauſe before them, vindicates the equity of his proceedings from the aſperſions they had caſt on them; and by moſt irrefragable Arguments refutes that injurious proverb which went currant among them; and in the cloſe appeals to themſelves, *O houſe of* Iſrael *are not my waies equal, are not your waies unequal?* Ezek. 18. the evidences were ſo clear that he remits the matter to their own determination. And generally we ſhall find that among all

all the Topics of diſſwaſion from ſin, there is none more cloſely preſt, then that of the folly of it. Idolatry was a ſin to which *Iſrael* had a great propenſion, and againſt which moſt of the Prophets admonitions were directed. And certainly it can never be more expos'd and the ſottiſh unreaſonableneſs of it better diſplaied, then we find it in the 44. chap. of *Iſaiah*. In like manner we may read the Prophet *Jeremy* diſſwading from the ſame ſin by Arguments of the moſt irrefragable conviction, *Jer.* 10.

17. AND as the Prophets omitted nothing as to the manner of their addreſs, to render their exhortations effectual, the matter of them was likewiſe ſo conſiderable as to command attention; It was commonly either the recalling them from their revolts and Apoſtacies from God by Idolatry, or elſe to convince them of the inſignificancy of all thoſe legal ceremonial performances they ſo much confided in, when taken up as a *ſuperſedeas* to moral duties. Upon this account it is, that they often depreciate, and in a manner prohibit the ſolemneſt of their worſhips. *To what purpoſe are the multitude of your ſacrifices nnto me? bring no more vain oblations: incenſe is an abomination to me; the new moons and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies I cannot away with: it is iniquity even your ſolemn meetings, &c.* Iſ. 1. 11. 13. Not that theſe things were

were in themselves reprovable; for they were all commanded by God; but because the Jews depended so much on these external observances, that they thought by them to commute for the *weightier matters of the Law* (as our Savior after stiles them) *Judgment, Mercy and Faith,* Mat. 23. 23. lookt on these Rites which discriminated them from other Nations, as dispensations from the universal obligations of nature and common justice.

18. This deceit of theirs is sharply upbraided to them by the Prophet *Jeremy*; where he calls their boasts of the *temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, lying words*: and on the contrary, laies the whole stress of their obedience, and expectation of their happiness on the justice and innocence of their conversation, ch. 7. 4. And after do's smartly reproch their insolence in boldly resorting to the house, which by bringing their sins along with them, they made but an Asylum, and Sanctuary for those crimes. *Will ye steal, murder and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to* Baal, *and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before me in this house? Is this house which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eies?* chap. 7. 9, 10, 11. Indeed all the Prophets seem to conspire in this one design, of making them look thro shadows and ceremonies,

nies, to that inward purity, Juſtice and Honeſty, which they were deſign'd to inculcate, not to ſupplant. And this deſign as it is in it ſelf moſt excellent, moſt worthy the command of God, and the nature of man; ſo we have ſeen that it has bin purſued by all the moſt apt, and moſt powerful mediums, that the thing or perſons addreſt to were capable of; and ſo that the Prophets are no leſs eminent for the diſcharge of this exhortatory part of their office, then they were in the former, of the predicting.

19. The next part of Scripture we are to conſider, is the Doctrinal; by which I ſhall not in this place underſtand the whole complex of Faith and Manners together; but reſtrain it only to thoſe Revelations which are the object of our Belief: and theſe are ſo ſublime, as ſhews fleſh and bloud never revel'd them. Thoſe great myſteries of our Faith, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Hypoſtatical union, the Redemtion of the world by making the offended party the ſacrifice for the offence, are things of ſo high and abſtruſe ſpeculation, as no finite underſtanding can fully fathom. I know their being ſo, is by ſom made an Argument for disbelief; but doubtleſs, very unjuſtly: for (not to inſiſt upon the different natures of Faith and Science, by which that becomes a proper object of the one which is not of the other) our non-

non-comprehenſion is rather an indication that they have a higher riſe; and renders it infinitly improbable that they could ſpring from mans invention. For 'twere to ſuppoſe too great a diſproportion between human faculties, to think men could invent what themſelves could not underſtand. Indeed theſe things lie ſo much out of the road of human imagination, that I dare appeal to the breſts of the moſt perverſe gain-ſaiers, whether ever they could have fallen into their thoughts without ſuggeſtion from without. And therefore 'tis a malicious contradiction to reject theſe truths becauſe of their diſſonancy from human reaſon, and yet at the ſame time to aſcribe their original to man. But certainly there can be nothing more inconſiſtent with mere natural reaſon, then to think God can be or do no more then man can comprehend. Never any Nation or perſon that own'd a Deity, did ever attemt ſo to circumſcribe him: and it is proportionable only to the licentious profaneſs of theſe later daies, thus to meſure immenſity and omnipotence by our narrow ſcantling.

20. THE more genuine and proper effect of theſe ſupernatural truths, is, to raiſe our admiration of that divine Wiſdom, *whoſe waies are ſo paſt finding out*; and to give us a juſt ſenſe of that infinit diſtance which is between it, and the higheſt of that reaſon wherein we

ſo

ſo pride our ſelves. And the great propriety theſe doctrins have to that end, may well be reckon'd as one part of their excellency.

21. INDEED there is no part of our holy Faith, but is naturally productive of ſom peculiar vertue; as the whole Scheme together engages us to be univerſally *holy in all manner of converſation*, *1 Pet. 1. 15.* And it is the ſupereminent advantage true Religion hath over all falſe ones, that it tends to ſo laudable an end.

22. THE Theology of the Heathens was in many inſtances an extract and quinteſſence of vice. Their moſt ſolemn Rites, and ſacredeſt Myſteries were of ſuch a nature, that inſtead of refining and elevating, they corrupted and debaſed their Votaries; immerſt them in all thoſe abominable pollutions which ſober nature abhorr'd. Whereas the principles of our Faith ſerve to ſpiritualize and rectify us, to raiſe us as much above mere manhood as theirs caſt them below it.

23. AND as they are of this vaſt advantage to us, ſo alſo are they juſt to God, in giving us right notions of him. What vile unworthy apprehenſions had the Heathen of their Deities; intitling them not only to the paſſions but even to the crimes of men: making *Jupiter* an adulterer, *Mercury* a thief, *Bacchus* a drunkard, *&c.* proportionably of the reſt? Whereas our God is repreſented to us as an

eſſence, ſo ſpiritual, and incorporeal, that we muſt be unbodied our ſelves before we can perfectly conceive what he is: ſo far from the impotent affections and inclinations of men, that he has neither parts, nor paſſions; and is fain to veil himſelf under that diſguiſe, to ſpeak ſomtimes as if he had, merely in condeſcenſion to our groſſer faculties. And again, ſo far from being an example, a patron of vice, this his *eies are too pure to behold iniquity*, Hab. 1. 13. Holineſs is an eſſential part of his nature, and he muſt deny himſelf to put it off.

24. THE greateſt deſcent that ever he made to humanity, was in the incarnation of the ſecond perſon: yet even in that, tho he was linked with a ſinful nature, yet he preſerved the perſon immaculate; and while he had all the ſins of the world upon him by imputation, ſuffer'd not any one to be inherent in him.

25. TO conclude, the Scripture deſcribes our God to us by all thoſe glorious Attributes of infinity, Power and Juſtice, which may render him the proper object of our Adorations and Reverence: and it diſcribes him alſo in thoſe gentler Attributes of Goodneſs, Mercy and Truth, which may excite our love of, and dependence on him. Theſe are repreſentations ſomthing worthy of God, and ſuch as impreſs upon our mind great thoughts of him.

26. BUT

26. BUT never did the divine Attributes ſo concur to exert themſelves, as in the myſtery of our Redemtion: where his Juſtice was ſatisfied without diminution to his Mercy; and his Mercy without entrenching on his Juſtice: his Holineſs moſt eminent in his indignation againſt ſin, and yet his Love no leſs ſo in ſparing ſinners: theſe contradictions being reconcil'd, this diſcord compos'd into harmony by his infinit Wiſdom. This is that ſtupendous Myſtery into which *the Angels deſir'd to look*, 1 *Pet.* 1. 12. And this is it which by *the Goſpel is preach'd unto us*; as it follows, ver. 25.

27. AND as the Scripture gives us this knowledg of God, ſo it do's alſo of our ſelves; in which two, all profitable knowledg is compriſed. It teaches us how vile we were in our original duſt; and how much viler yet in our fall, which would have ſunk us below our firſt principles, ſent us not only to earth, but hell. It ſhews the impotence of our lapſed eſtate; that we are not *able of our ſelves ſo much as to think a good thought*: and it ſhews us alſo the dignity of our renovated eſtate, that we *are heirs of God, and fellow-heirs with Chriſt*, Ro. 8. 17. yet leſt this might puff us up with miſtaken hopes; it plainly acquaints us with the condition on which this depends; that it muſt be our obedience both active and paſſive, which is to intitle us to it: that we

muſt *be faithful to death, if we mean to inherit a crown of life*, Rev. 2. 10. and that *we muſt ſuffer with Chriſt, if we will be glorified with him*, Ro. 8. 17. And upon ſuppoſition that we perform our parts of the condition, it gives us the moſt certain aſſurance, engages Gods veracity that he will not fail on his. By this it gives us ſupport againſt all the adverſities of life; aſſuring us *the ſufferings of it are not worthy to be compared with the glory we expect*, Rom. 8. 18. yea, and againſt the terrors of death too; by aſſuring us that what we look on as a diſſolution, is but a temporary parting; and we only put off our bodies, that they may put off corruption, and be clothed with immortality.

28. THESE and the like are the doctrins the holy Scripture offers to us: and we may certainly ſay, they are *faithful ſayings*, and *worthy* of *all acceptation*, 1 Tim. 4. 15. The notions it gives us of God are ſo ſublime and great, that they cannot but affect us with reverence, and admiration: and yet withall, ſo amiable and endearing that they cannot but raiſe love and gratitude, affiance and delight.

29. AND, which is yet more, theſe milder Attributes are apt to inſpirit us with a generous ambition of aſſimilation; excite us to tranſcribe all his imitable excellencies: in which the very Heathens could diſcern conſiſted

ſiſted the accompliſhment of human felicity.

30. AND then the knowledg it gives us of our ſelves, do's us the kindeſt office imaginable: keeps us from thoſe ſwelling thoughts we are too apt to entertain, and ſhews us the neceſſity of bottoming our hopes upon a firmer foundation: and then again keeps us from being lazy or ſecure, by ſhewing us the neceſſity of our own endevors. In a word, it teaches us to be humble and induſtrious, and whoever is ſo ballaſted can hardly be ſhipwrackt.

31. THESE are the excellencies of the doctrinal part of Scripture, which alſo renders them moſt aptly preparative for the preceptive. And indeed, ſo they were deſign'd: the *Credenda* and the *Agenda* being ſuch inſeparable relations, that whoever parts them, forfeits the advantage of both. The moſt ſolemn profeſſion of Chriſt, the moſt importunate invocations, Lord, Lord, will ſignify nothing to them *which do not the things which he ſaies*, Mat. 7. And how excellent, how rational thoſe precepts are which the Scripture propoſes to us from him, is our next point of conſideration.

32. THE firſt Law which God gave to mankind was that of nature. And tho the impreſſions of it upon the mind be by *Adams* fall exceedingly dimm'd and defac'd; yet that

that derogates nothing from the dignity and worth of that Law, which God has bin so far from cancelling, that he seems to have made it the rule and square of his subsequent Laws: so that nothing is injoin'd in those, but what is consonant and agreable to that. The Moral Law given in the Decalogue to the Jews, the Evangelical Law given in the Gospel to Christians, have this natural Law for their basis and foundation. They licence nothing which that prohibits, and very rarely prohibit any thing which it licences.

33. 'Tis true, Christ in his Sermon on the Mount, raises Christians to a greater strictness then the Jews thought themselves oblig'd to; but that was not by contradicting either the natural, or moral Law, but by rescuing the later from those corruptions which the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees had mixt with it; and reducing it to its primitive integrity, and extent. In a word, as the Decalogue was given to repair the defacings, and renew the impressions of the natural Law; so the precepts of the Gospel were design'd to revive and illustrate both. And accordingly we find Christ, in the matter of divorce, calls them back to this natural Law; *In the beginning it was not so*, Mat. 19. 8. I say not but that even these natural notions are in som instances refin'd and elevated by Christ; the second *Adam* being to repair the fall of the first with

with advantage: but yet he ſtill builds upon that ground-work, introduces nothing that is inconſiſtent with it.

34. AND this accordance between theſe ſeveral Laws is a circumſtance that highly recommends Scripture precepts to us. We cannot imagin but that God who made man for no other end but to be an inſtrument of his glory, and a recipient of all communicable parts of his happineſs, would aſſign him ſuch rules and meſures as were moſt conducive to thoſe ends. And therefore ſince the Scripture injunctions are of the ſame mould, we muſt conclude them to be ſuch as tend to the perfection of our being; the making us what God originally intended us: and he that would not be that, will certainly chuſe much worſe for himſelf.

35. I know there have bin prejudices taken up againſt the precepts of Chriſt, as if they impos'd unreaſonable, unſupportable ſtrictneſſes upon men: and ſom have aſſum'd liberty to argue mutinouſly againſt them; nay, againſt God too for putting ſuch natural appetites into men, and then forbidding them to ſatisfy them.

36. BUT the ground of this cavil is the not rightly diſtinguiſhing of natural appetites, which are to be differenc'd according to the two ſtates of rectitude and depravation: thoſe of the firſt rank are the appetites

God

God put into man; and thoſe were all regular and innocent, ſuch as tended to the preſervation of his being: nature in its firſt integrity meſuring its deſires by its needs. Now Chriſts prohibitions are not directed againſt theſe, he forbids no one kind of theſe deſires. And tho the precept of ſelf-denial may ſomtimes reſtrain us in ſom particular acts; yet that is but proportionable to that reſtraint *Adam* was under in relation to the forbidden tree, a particular inſtance of his obedience, and fence of his ſafety. So that if men would conſider nature under this its firſt and beſt notion, they cannot accuſe Chriſt of being ſevere to it.

37. BUT 'tis manifeſt they take it in another acception, and mean that corruption of nature which inordinatly inclines to ſenſitive things; and on this account they call their riots, their luxuries, appetites put into them by God: whereas 'tis manifeſt this was ſuperinduced from another coaſt: The wiſe man gives us its true pedigree in what he ſaies of death, which is its twin-ſiſter: *By the envy of the devil came death into the world,* Wiſ. 2. 24. And can they expect that Chriſt who came to *deſtroy the works of the devil,* 1 Joh. 3.8. ſhould frame Laws in their favor, make Acts of toleration and indulgence for them? This were to annul the whole deſign of his coming into the world, which was to reſtore us from our

lapſt

lapſt eſtate, and elevate us to thoſe higher degrees of purity which he came not only to preſcribe, but to exemplify to us.

38. BUT in this affair men often take nature in a yet wider and worſe notion; and under natural deſires comprehend whatever upon any ſort of motive they have a mind to do. The awe of a ſuperior, the importunity of a companion, cuſtom, and example, make men do many ill things, to which their nature would never promt them; nay, many times ſuch as their nature reluctſ to, and abhors, 'Tis certainly thus in all debauchery and exceſs: 'Tis evident, it gratifies no mans nature to be drunk, or to lie under undigeſted loads of meats: theſe are out-rages and violences upon nature, take it only in the moſt ſenſitive notion, ſuch as ſhe ſtruggles to avert: and yet men make her bear, not only the oppreſſion, but the blame too.

39. BUT beſides 'tis to be conſider'd, that the nature of a man includes reaſon as well as ſenſe, and to this all ſorts of luxury are yet more repugnant, as that which clouds the mind, and degrades the man (who in his conſtitution is a rational being) and ſets him in the rank of mere animals: and certainly theſe can be no appetites of nature, which thus ſubvert it.

40. THE like may be ſaid concerning revenge, particularly that abſurdeſt ſort of it,

duels; which certainly are as great contradictions to nature as can be imagin'd, the unravelling and cancelling its very firſt principle of ſelf-preſervation, (which in other inſtances men bring in bar againſt duty.) And yet men will ſay the generoſity of their natures compels them to it; ſo making their natures a kind of *felo de ſe* to promt the deſtroying it ſelf: when alas 'tis only the falſe notion they have got of honor that ſo engages them. And if men would but ſoberly conſider, they muſt be convinc'd that there is nothing more agreeable to reaſon then that precept of Chriſt of not retaliating injuries; which is in effect but to bid us to chuſe a ſingle inconvenience before a long train of miſchiefs. And certainly if nature even in its deprav'd eſtate were left to determine, it would reſolve it a better bargain to go off with a reprochful word, then to loſe a limb, perhaps a life in the revenge of it. There being no maxim more indiſputable, then that of evils the leaſt is to be choſen. And the innate principle of ſelf-love do's more ſtrongly biaſs nature to preſerve it ſelf, then any external thing can to deſtroy it.

41. I know 'twill be ſaid to this, that revenge is a natural appetite: but I ſay ſtill, ſelf-preſervation is more ſo; and would prevail againſt as much of revenge as is natural, were it not heightned and fortified by phancy, and

that

that Chimera of point of honor, which, as it is now ſtated, is certainly one of the moſt emty nothings that ever was brought in balance with ſolid intereſts. And indeed 'tis to belie nature, and ſuppoſe it to have forfeited all degrees of reaſon, as well as vertue, to faſten ſo abſurd a choice upon her. But admit revenge to be never ſo much the dictate of corrupt nature; 'tis certain 'tis not of primitive regular nature. Revenge is but a relative to injury: and he that will ſay God put the appetite of revenge into man, muſt ſay he put the appetite of injury into him alſo: which is ſuch an account of the ſixth daies creation, as is hardly conſiſtent with Gods own teſtimony of its being *very good*, Gen. 1.

42. BESIDES, 'tis certain all the deſires God infus'd into human nature, were ſuch as tended to its preſervation; but this of revenge, is of all other the moſt deſtructive, as is too ſadly atteſted by the daily tragical effects of it. In ſhort, the wiſe man gives a good ſummary of the whole matter: *God made man upright, but he ſought out many inventions*, Eccl. 7. 29.

43. NOW if man have by his own voluntary act deprav'd himſelf, it would be neither juſt nor kind in God to warp his Laws to mans now diſtorted frame; but it is both, to keep up the perfect rectitude of thoſe, and call upon man to reduce himſelf to a confor-

mity with them: and when to this is added ſuch a ſupply of grace as may ſilence the plea of diſability, there can nothing be imagin'd more worthy of God, or more indulgent to man.

44. And all this Chriſt do's in the Goſpel, in thoſe precepts which the blind world makes the ſubject of their cavil or ſcorn. It were an eaſy task to evince this in every particular precept of the Goſpel; but I ſhall content my ſelf with the inſtances already given, and not ſwell this Tract by inſiſting upon what has already bin the ſubject of ſo many pious and excellent diſcourſes, as muſt already have convinc'd all but the obſtinate.

45. We proceed therefore to a view of the promiſſory parts of Scripture; in which we are firſt in general to obſerve the great goodneſs of God, in making any promiſes at all to us; and next to examin of what nature and excellence theſe promiſes are. And firſt if we conſider how many titles God has to our obedience, we muſt acknowledg he may challenge it as his undoubted right. We are the work of his hands; and if the Potter have power over the clay (the materials whereof are not of his making) much more has God over his creatures, whoſe matter as well as form is wholly owing to him. We are the price of his blood. And if men account purchaſe an indefeiſible title, God muſt

muſt have abſolute dominion over what he has bought, and at ſo dear a price too as his own blood. Laſtly we depend upon him for the ſupport of that being he has given us: we live merely upon his bounty, ſpend upon his ſtock. And what Patron will not expect obſervance from one who thus ſubſiſts by him?

46. YET as if God had none of theſe claims, theſe preingagements upon us, he deſcends to treat with us as free-men, by way of Article and compact; buies his own of us, and engages to reward that obedience, which he might upon the utmoſt penalties exact: which is ſuch an aſtoniſhing indulgence as our higheſt gratitude cannot reach: and of this the ſacred Scriptures are the evidences and records; and therefore upon that account deſerve at once our reverence, and our joy.

47. BUT this will yet farther appear, if we look in the ſecond place into the promiſes themſelves; which are ſo extenſive as to take in both our preſent and future ſtate: according to that of the Apoſtle; *Godlineſs hath the promiſe of this life, and of that which is to come,* 1 Tim. 4. 8. For the preſent, they are proportion'd to the ſeveral parts of our compoſition; the body, and the mind, the outward and the inward man; ſo ſtretching themſelves to all we can really be concern'd for in this world.

48. AND firſt for the body, the Old Teſtament

ſtament abounds in promiſes of this ſort. The firſt part of the 28. of Deut. contains a full catalogue of all temporal bleſſings; and thoſe irreverſibly entail'd upon the Iſraelites obedience, ver. 1. The Pſalmiſt tells us, *they that fear the Lord ſhall lack nothing*, Pſ. 34. 9. *that they ſhall not be confounded in the perilous time, and in the daies of dearth they ſhall have enough*, Pſ. 37. 19. And *Solomon, that the Lord will not ſuffer the righteous to famiſh*, Pro. 10. 3. And tho under the Goſpel, the promiſes of temporal affluence ſeem not ſo large; (its deſign being to ſpiritualize us, and raiſe our minds to higher injoiments;) yet it gives us ample ſecurity of ſo much as is really good for us. It ſuperſedes our care for our ſelves by aſſuring us *all theſe things ſhall be added to us*, Mat. 6. 33. that is, *all thoſe things which our heavenly Father knows we have need of*, ver. 32. which is all the limitation the context gives. And certainly we have little temtation to fear want, who have him for our provider; *whoſe are all the beaſts of the Forreſt, and the cattel upon a thouſand hills*, Pſ. 50. 10.

49. And when we are thus ſecur'd of all things neceſſary, it may perhaps be an equal mercy to ſecure us from great abundance; which at the beſt, is but a *lading ones ſelf with thick clay*, in the Prophets phraſe, *Hab. 2. 6.* but is often a ſnare as well as a burden.

50. Beſides, the Goſpel by its precepts of

of temperance and ſelf-denial, do's ſo contract our appetites, that a competence is a more adequate promiſe to them, then that of ſuperfluity would have bin: and 'tis alſo the meſure wherein all the true ſatisfaction of the ſenſes conſiſt; which are gratifi'd with moderate pleſures, but ſuffocated and overwhelm'd with exceſſive. The temperat man taſts and reliſhes his portion, whilſt the voluptuous may rather be ſaid to wallow in his plenty then injoy it.

51. AND as the neceſſaries of life, ſo life it ſelf, and the continuance of that, is a Scripture promiſe. The fifth Commandment affixes it to one particular duty: but it is in a multitude of places in the Old Teſtament annex'd to general obedience. Thus it is, *Deut. 11. 9.* and again, ver. 21. And *Solomon* propoſes this practical wiſdom as the multiplier of daies: *By me thy daies ſhall be multipli'd, and the years of thy life ſhall be increas'd,* Pro. 9. 11. and chap. 3. *Length of daies is in her right hand,* ver. 16. And tho we find not this promiſe repeted in the New Teſtament, yet neither is it retracted: 'tis true, the Goſpel bids us be ready to lay down our lives for Chriſts ſake, but it tells us withal, that he that will loſe his life, ſhall ſave it: which tho it be univerſally true only in the ſpiritual ſenſe, yet it often proves ſo in a literal. It did ſo eminently in the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem,*

lem, where the moſt reſolute Chriſtians eſcap'd, while the baſe compliers periſh'd together with thoſe they ſought to endear. This is certain, that if the New Teſtament do not expreſly promiſe long life, yet it do's by its rules of temperance and ſobriety, contentedneſs and chearfulneſs, very much promote it: and ſo do's virtually and efficaciouſly ratify thoſe the Old Teſtament made.

52. THE next outward bleſſing is reputation: and this alſo is a Scripture promiſe. *The wiſe ſhall inherit glory*, Prov. 3. 38. And the vertuous woman *Solomon* deſcribes, is not only bleſſed by her children and huſband, but *ſhe is praiſed in the gate*, Pro. 31. *ult.* Nay, this bleſſing is extended even beyond life: *The memory of the juſt ſhall be bleſſed*, Pro. 10. 7. Nor do's the Goſpel evacuate this promiſe; but rather promts us to the waies of having it made good to us, by adviſing us to *abſtain from all appearance of evil*, 1 Theſ. 5. 22. *to provide for honeſt things, not only in the ſight of God, but alſo in the ſight of men*, 2 Cor. 8. 21.

53. 'TIS true indeed, Chriſt fore-warns his Diſciples that they ſhall be revil'd, and *have all manner of evil ſpoken againſt them falſly, for his names ſake*: but then the cauſe transform'd the ſufferings, and made it ſo honorable, that they were *to count it matter of joy*, Mat. 5. 11, 12. Neither was this any paradox

radox even in relation to their reputation; which tho ſullied by a few ill men of that age, yet has bin moſt illuſtrious among all Ages ſince. Their ſufferings and indignities gave them a new title of honor, and added the Martyr to the Apoſtle. And the event has bin proportionable in all ſucceſſions ſince: Thoſe holy men that fill'd up the Pagan priſons, fill'd up the Churches Diptycs alſo, and have bin had as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, *in everlaſting remembrance*, Pſ. 112. 6.

54. AND as Scripture-promiſes thus take in all the concerns of the outward man, ſo do they alſo of the inward. The fundamental promiſe of this kind, is that of *ſending Chriſt into the world*, and *in him eſtabliſhing the new Covenant*, which we find, *Jer.* 31. 31. and is referr'd to by the Author to the Hebrews, *I will put my Laws in their hearts, and write them in their minds; and their ſins and iniquities will I remember no more*, Heb. 10. 16.

55. AND this is ſo comprehenſive a promiſe as includes all the concerns of the inward man. The evils incident to the mind of man may be reduc'd to two; impurity, and inquietude: and here is a cure to both. The divine Law written in the heart, drives thence all thoſe ſwarms of noyſom luſt, which like the Egyptian Frogs over-run and putrify the ſoul. Where that is ſeated and enſhrin'd, thoſe can no more ſtand before it, then *Da-*

gon before the Ark. This repairs the divine Image in us (in which consists the perfection of our nature) *renews us in the spirits of our minds*, Eph. 4. 22. *and purges our consciences from dead works*, Heb. 9. 4. which all the Cathartics and Lustrations among the Heathen, all the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Law were not able to do.

56. SECONDLY, this promise secures the mind from that restlesness and unquietness, which attends both the dominion and guilt of sin. To be subject to a mans lusts and corrupt appetites is of all others the vilest vassallage: they are the cruellest task-masters, and allow their slaves no rest, no intermission of their drudgery. And then again, the guilt that tortures and racks the mind with dreadful expectations, keeps it in perpetual agitation and tumult; which is excellently describ'd by the Prophet *Isaiah, The wicked is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest; whose waters cast out mire and dirt: there is no peace saith my God to the wicked*, Is. 48. 22. How prosperous soever vice may seem to be in the world, yet there are such secret pangs and horrors that dog it, that as *Solomon* saies, *even in laughter the heart is sorrowful*, Prov. 14. 13.

57. BUT this Evangelical promise of being *merciful to our iniquities, and remembring our sins no more*, calms this tempest, introduces peace and serenity into the mind, and

and reconciles us at once to God and our ſelves. And ſure we may well ſay with the Apoſtle, theſe are *great and precious promiſes*, 2. Pet. 1. 4.

58. THERE are beſides many other which ſpring from theſe principal, as ſuckers from the root: ſuch are the promiſes of freſh ſupplies of grace upon a good imploiment of the former. *To him that hath ſhall be given*, Mat. 25. 29. Nay, even of the ſource and fountain of all grace. *He ſhall give the holy ſpirit to them that aſk him*, Mat. 7. 11. Such is that of ſupporting us in all difficulties and aſſaults: *the not ſuffering us to be temted above that we are able*, 1 Cor. 10. 13. which like Gods *bow ſet in the clouds*, Gen. 9. is our ſecurity, that we ſhall not be over-whelm'd by any deluge of temtation: and (to inſtance no more) ſuch is that comprehenſive promiſe of hearing our praiers, *Aſk and it ſhall be given you*, Mat. 7. 7. This puts all good things within our reach, gives us the key of Gods Store-houſe, from whence we may furniſh our ſelves with all that is really good for us. And if a few full Barns could temt the rich man in the Goſpel, to pronounce a Requiem to his ſoul; what notes of acquieſcence may they ſing, who have the command of an inexhauſtible ſtore; that are ſuppli'd by him whoſe is the earth, and the fulneſs thereof?

59. AND certainly, all theſe promiſes together

gether must be (to use the Apostles phrase) *strong consolation*; such as may quiet and calm all the fears and griefs, all the tumults and perturbations of the mind, in relation to its present state. But then there are others relating to the future of a much higher elevation: those glories and felicities of another world, which are so far beyond our narrow conceptions, that the comprehension and injoiment must begin together. The Scripture shadows it out to us by all the notions we have of happiness: by *glory*, Rom. 8. 18. by a *kingdom*, Mat. 25. 14. by *joy*, Mat. 25. 21. and which comprehends all, by *being with the Lord*, 1 Thes. 4. 17. *seeing him face to face*, 1 Cor. 13. 12. *being like to him*, 1 Jo. 3. 2. In a word 'tis *bliss* in the utmost extent: immense for quantity, and eternal for duration.

60. And surely this promise is so excellent for kind, so liberal in its degree, so transcendently great in all respects, that did it stand single, stript of all those that relate to this life, it alone would justify the name of Gospel, and be the best tidings that ever came to mankind. For alas, if we compare the hopes that other Religions propose to their Votaries with these, how base, how ignoble are they! The Heathens Elysium, the Mahumetan Paradise, were but higher gratifications of the sensual part, and consequently were depressions and debasements of the rational. So that in effect they

they provided a heaven for the beaſt, and a hell for the man. We may therfore confidently reſume our concluſion, and pronounce the Scripture promiſes to be ſo divine and excellent, that they could as little have bin made, as they can be perform'd by any but an holy and almighty Author.

61. NOR is their being conditional any impeachment to their worth, but an enhanſement. Should God have made them (as ſom phancy he has his decrees) abſolute and irreſpective; he had ſet his promiſes at war with his precepts, and theſe ſhould have ſuperſeded what thoſe injoin. We are all very niggardly towards God, and ſhould have bin apt to have ask'd *Judas*'s queſtion; *to what purpoſe is this waſt?* Mat. 26. 8. What needs the labor of the courſe if the prize be certain? And it muſt have bin infinitly below the wiſdom and majeſty of the ſupreme Legiſlator, to make Laws, and then evacuate them by diſpencing rewards without any aſpect on their obſervance. 'Tis the Sanction which inſpirits the Law, without which the divine, as well as the human, would to moſt men be a *dead letter*.

62. BUT againſt this God has abundantly provided, not only by the conditionality of the promiſes, but by the terror of his threats too; which is the laſt part of Scripture which falls under conſideration. And theſe are of the

the moſt direful kinds; and cannot better be illuſtrated then by the oppoſition they ſtand in to the promiſes: for as thoſe included all things that might make men happy either as to this life or the next; ſo theſe do all that may make them miſerable. If we make our reflection on all the particulars of the promiſes, we ſhall find the threats anſwering them as their reverſe or dark ſhadow.

63. AND firſt as concerning the outward ſtate, if we look but into the 28 of *Deut.* we ſhall find, that after all the gracious promiſes which begun the chapter, it finally ends in thunder, in the moſt dreadful denunciations imaginable; and thoſe adapted by a moſt peculiar oppoſition to the former promiſes: as the Reader may ſee at large in that Chapter. And the whole tenor of the Scripture go's in the like ſtile. Thus, Pſal. 140. 11. *A wicked perſon ſhall not proſper in the earth, evill ſhall hunt the wicked man to overthrow him. The Lord will not ſuffer the righteous to famiſh, but he caſteth out the ſubſtance of the wicked;* Pro. 10. 3. And again, the *righteous eateth to the ſatisfying of his ſoul, but the belly of the wicked ſhall want,* Pro. 13. 25. Multitudes of like general threatnings of temporal improſperity there are every where ſcatter'd throout the Scripture; and many more appli'd to particular vices, as ſloth, unmercifulneſs, luxury,

luxury, and the like; which would be here too long to enumerate.

64. AND altho theſe threatnings may ſeem ſomtimes to be literally confuted by the wealth and opulency of wicked men, yet they never miſs of being really and vertually verified. For either their proſperities are very ſhort, and only preparative to a more eminent ruin, which was the Pſalmiſts reſolution of this doubt, *Pſal.* 72. or elſe if God leave them the matter of temporal happineſs, yet he ſubſtracts the vertue and ſpirit of them, renders them emty and unſatisfying. This is well expreſt by the Pſalmiſt in the caſe of the Iſraelites: *He gave them their deſire, and ſent leaneſs withall into their ſoul*, Pſa. 106. 15. and by *Zophar*, Job 20. 22. where ſpeaking of the wicked, he ſaith; *In the fulneſs of his ſufficiency ſhall he be in ſtraits.* And to this *Solomon* ſeems to refer, when he ſaith, *the bleſſing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no ſorrow with it*, Pro. 10.22.

65. NEITHER is it only the comforts of life, but life it ſelf that is threatned to be taken from wicked men: untimely death is throout the Old Teſtament frequently mention'd as the guerdon of impiety: 'tis often aſſign'd judicially in particular caſes: *He ſhall be cut off from his people*, being the uſual ſentence upon moſt offenders under the Levitical Law. But 'tis alſo menaced more generally

rally as an immediat judgment from God: *The blood-thirſty and deceitful men ſhall not live out half their daies*, Pſal. 55. 23. Farther yet, their names ſhall putrify as ſoon as their Carkaſſes: *the name of the wicked ſhall rot*; Pro. 10. 7. Nay both their infamy and their ruin are intail'd upon their poſterity. *The ſeed of evil doers ſhall never be renown'd. Prepare ſlaughter for his children, for the iniquity of their fathers*; Iſa. 14. 20. 21.

66. If now we look on Scripture threatnings in relation to the mind of man, we ſhall find them yet more ſevere: wilful impenitent ſinners being cut off from the benefits of the new covenant; nor barely ſo, but look'd upon as deſpiſers of it, and that blood of Chriſt in which it was ſeal'd; Heb. 10. 29. nay as thoſe murtherous Wretches that ſhed it: *They crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh*; *Heb.* 6. 6. And this is the fatalleſt ſentence that can fall on any man in this life; to be thus disfranchiſed of all the priviledges of the Goſpel, and rankt as well in puniſhment as guilt, with the moſt criminous of mankind.

67. From hence 'tis conſequent, that the mind remains not only in its native impurity, but in a greater and more incurable one; whilſt that bloud which alone could cleanſe it, ſerves but to embrue and pollute it; and as it were fluſh, and excite it to all imma-

immanities and vileneſſes: and *he that is* thus *filthy*, 'tis the doom pronounc'd againſt him, that he *ſhall be filthy ſtill*, Rev. 22. 11.

68. AND then in the ſecond place, what calm can there be to ſuch a mind? what remains to ſuch a perſon, but that *fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation*, which the Apoſtle mentions, *Heb.* 10. 27. Indeed, were there none but temporal miſchiefs to fear, yet it were very unpleſant to think ones ſelf, like *Cain*, out-law'd from the preſence and protection of God; to be afraid *that every man that meets us ſhould ſlay us*, *Gen.* 4. 14. Nay, thoſe confus'd indiſtinct fears of indefinite evils which attend guilt, are very unquiet uneaſy inmates in the mind. This is excellently deſcrib'd by *Moſes*; *The Lord ſhall give thee a trembling heart, and failing of eies, and ſorrow of mind, and thy life ſhall hang in doubt before thee, and thou ſhalt fear day and night; in the morning thou ſhalt ſay, would God it were evening, and in the evening, would God it were morning*, Deut. 28. 65, 66, 67.

69. AND what can be more wr tched then to have a mind thus agitated and toſt, rackt and tortur'd; eſpecially when thro all theſe clouds it ſees a glimpſe of the eternal Tophet; and knows, that from the billows of this uneaſy ſtate, it muſt be toſt into that Lake of fire. And this is indeed *the dregs of*

both jointly concur to awake our induſtry.

73. For God has bin ſo good to mankind, as to make the threats conditional as well as the promiſes: ſo that we as well know the way to avoid the one, as we do to attain the other. Nor has he any other intendment or end in propoſing them, but that we may do ſo. See to this purpoſe, with what ſolemnity he proteſts it by *Moſes*; *I call heaven and earth to record againſt you this day that I have ſet before you life and death, bleſſing and curſing; therefore chuſe life, that both thou and thy ſeed may live*, Deut. 30. 19.

74. I have now run thro the ſeveral parts of Scripture I propoſed to ſpeak of. And tho I have in each given rather ſhort inſtances and eſſaies then an exact deſcription, yet even in theſe contracted lineaments the exquiſit proportions may be diſcern'd. And if the Reader ſhall hence be incourag'd to extend his contemplations, and as he reads holy Scripture, obſerve it in all its graces, and full dimenſions; I doubt not he will pronounce from his experience, that the matter of the divine Book is very correſpondent to the Author: which is the higheſt Eulogy imaginable.

75. In the next place we are to conſider the holy Scripture in relation to its end and deſign; in proportion to which every thing is more or leſs valuable. The moſt exquiſit frame

frame, and curious contrivance, that has no determinat end or uſe, is but a piece of induſtrious folly, a *Spiders web*, as the Prophet ſpeaks, *Iſa, 59. 5.* Now thoſe deſigns have alwaies been eſteem'd the moſt excellent that have had the moſt worthy ſubjects, and bin of the greateſt extent. Accordingly, thoſe who have projected the obliging and benefiting of other men (tho but within a privat Sphere) have alwaies bin lookt on as men of generous and noble deſigns. Thoſe who have taken their level higher, and directed their aim to a more public good, tho but of a City or Nation, have proportionably acquir'd a greater eſteem. But thoſe who have aſpir'd to be univerſal benefactors, to do ſomthing for the common benefit of the world, their fame has commonly reach'd as far as their influence; men have reverenc'd, nay ſomtimes (according to the common exceſſes of mans nature) ador'd them. Many of the heathen deities (eſpecially their demigods) having bin only thoſe perſons, who by introducing ſom uſeful Art, or other part of knowledg, had oblig'd mankind. So we ſee what a natural gratitude men are apt to pay to worthy and generous deſigns. And if we will be content but to ſtand to this common award of our nature, the Scripture will have the faireſt claim imaginable to our reverence and thankfulneſs, upon this very account of

of the excellency of its deſigns.

76. NOR need we borrow the balance of the Sanctuary to weigh them in; we may do it in our own ſcales; for they exactly anſwer the two properties above mention'd, of profit and diffuſiveneſs which in ſecular concerns are the ſtandard rules of good deſigns. For firſt, it is the ſole ſcope and aim of Scripture, the very end for which 'twas writ, to benefit and advantage men; and that ſecondly, not only ſom ſmall ſelect number, ſom little angle or corner of the world, but the whole race of mankind, the entire Univerſe; and he that can imagin a more diffuſive deſign, muſt imagin more worlds alſo.

77. NOW for the firſt of theſe, that it is the deſign of the Scripture to benefit men, we need appeal but to Scripture it ſelf; which ſurely can give the beſt account to what ends 'tis directed; and that tells us, it *is to make us wiſe unto ſalvation*, 2 Tim. 3. 15. In which is comprehended the greateſt benefit that mans nature is capable of: the making us wiſe while we live here, and the ſaving us eternally. And this ſure is the moſt generous, the moſt obliging deſign, that 'tis poſſible even for the Creator to have upon the creature: and this is it which the holy Scripture negotiates with us.

78. AND firſt, the making us wiſe, is ſo inviting a propoſal to humanity, that we ſee when

when that was much wiſer then now it is, it caught at a fallacious tender of it; the very ſound of it, tho out of the devils mouth, faſcinated our firſt Parents, and hurried them to the higheſt diſobedience, and certaineſt ruin. And therefore now God by the holy Scriptures makes us an offer as much more ſafe, as it is more ſincere; when he ſends his Word thus to be *a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths*, Pſ. 119. 105. to teach us all that is good for us to know, our affectation of ignorance will be more culpable then theirs of knowledg, if we do not admire the kindneſs, & embrace the bounty of ſuch a tender.

79. Now the making us wiſe muſt be underſtood according to the Scripture notion of wiſdom, which is *not the wiſdom of this world, nor of the Princes of this world, which come to nought*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *1 Cor. 2. 5. but that wiſdom which deſcends from above*, Ja. 3. 17. which he there deſcribes to be *firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, with out partiality, and without hypocriſy*. Indeed the Scripture uſually comprehends theſe and all other graces under Wiſdom; for it makes it ſynonymous to that which includes them all, *viz.* the fear of the Lord. Thus we find throout the whole Book of Proverbs theſe us'd as terms convertible. In ſhort, Wiſdom is that practical knowledg of God and our ſelves

which

which engages us to obedience and duty; and this is agreeable to that definition the Wiſe man gives of it; *The wiſdom of the prudent is to underſtand his way*, Pro. 14. 8. Without this, all the moſt refin'd and aerial ſpeculations, are but like *Thales*'s ſtar-gazing; which ſecur'd him not from falling in the water; nay, betrai'd him to it. In this is all ſolid wiſdom compris'd.

80. THE utmoſt all the wiſe men in the world have pretended to, is but to know what true happineſs is, and what is the means of attaining it: and what they ſought with ſo much ſtudy, and ſo little ſucceſs, the Scripture preſents us with in the greateſt certainty, and plaineſt characters, ſuch as *he that runs may read*, Hab. 2. 2. It acquaints us with that ſupreme felicity, that chief good whereof Philoſophy could only give us a name; and it ſhews us the means, marks us out a path which will infallibly lead us to it. Accordingly we find that *Solomon* after all the accurate ſearch he had made to find *what was that good for the ſons of men*; he ſhuts up his inqueſt in this plain concluſion: *Fear God and keep his commandments; for God ſhall bring every work unto judgment*, Eccleſ. 12. 13, 14. The regulating our lives ſo by the rules of Piety, as may acquit us at our final account, is the moſt eligible thing that falls within human cognizance; and that not only in relation

tion to the ſuperlative happineſs of the next world, but even to the quiet and tranquillity of this. For alas, we are impotent giddy creatures, ſwai'd ſomtimes by one paſſion, ſomtimes by another; nay often the interfearing of our appetites makes us irreſolute which we are to gratify, whilſt in the interim their ſtrugling agitates and turmoils the mind. And what can be more deſirable in ſuch a caſe, then to put our ſelves under a wiſer conduct then our own; and as oppreſt States uſe to defeat all leſſer pretenders by becoming homagers to ſom more potent: ſo for us to deliver our ſelves from the tyranny of our luſts, by giving up our obedience to him whoſe ſervice is perfect freedom.

81. WERE there no other advantage of the exchange, but the bringing us under fixt and determinat Laws, 'twere very conſiderable. Every man would gladly know the terms of his ſubjection, and have ſom ſtanding rule to guide himſelf by; and Gods Laws are ſo; we may certainly know what he requires of us: but the mandats of our paſſions are arbitrary and extemporary: what pleaſes them to day diſguſts them to morrow; and we muſt alwaies be in readineſs to do we know not what, and of all the Arbitrary governments that men either feel or fear, this is doubtleſs the moſt miſerable. I wiſh our apprehenſions of it were but as ſenſible: and

then we ſhould think the holy Scripture did us the office of a Patriot, in offering us a reſcue from ſo vile a ſlavery.

82. AND that it do's make us this offer, is manifeſt by the whole tenor of the Bible. For firſt it rowzes and awakes us to a ſenſe of our condition, ſhews us that what we call liberty, is indeed the ſaddeſt ſervitude; that *he that committeth ſin is the ſervant of ſin*, Jo. 8. 34. that thoſe vices which pretend to ſerve and gratify us, do really ſubdue and enſlave us, and fetter when they ſeem to embrace: and whereas the will in all other oppreſſions retains its liberty, this tyranny brings that alſo into vaſſallage: renders our ſpirits ſo mean and ſervile, that we chuſe bondage; are apt to ſay with the Iſraelites, *Let us alone that we may ſerve the Egyptians*, Ex. 14. 12.

83. AND what greater kindneſs can be don for people in this forlorn abject condition, then to animate them to caſt off this yoke, and recover their freedom. And to this are moſt of the Scripture exhortations addreſt; as may be ſeen in a multitude of places, particularly in the ſixth chapter to the *Romans*, the whole ſcope whereof is directly to this purpoſe.

84. NOR do's it only ſound the alarm, put us upon the conteſt with our enemies, but it aſſiſts us in it, furniſhes us with that *whole armor of God* which we find deſcrib'd, *Eph.* 6. 13. Nay further

further it excites our courage, by aſſuring us that if we will not baſely ſurrender our ſelves, we can never be overpower'd if we do but ſtand our ground; reſiſt our enemy, he *will fly from us*; Ja. 4. 7. And to that purpoſe it directs us under what banner we are to liſt our ſelves; even his who *hath ſpoil'd principalities and powers*, Col. 2. 15. to whoſe conduct and diſcipline if we conſtantly adhere, we cannot miſs of victory.

85. AND then laſtly it ſets before us the prize of this conqueſt; that we ſhall not only recover our liberty, manumit our ſelves from the vileſt bondage to the vileſt and cruelleſt oppreſſors; but we ſhall be crown'd for it too, be rewarded for being kind to our ſelves, and be made happy eternally hereafter for being willing to be happy here.

86. AND ſure theſe are terms ſo apparently advantageous, that he muſt be infinitly ſtupid (fooliſh to deſtruction) that will not be thus made wiſe unto ſalvation, that deſpiſes or cavils at this divine Book, which means him ſo much good, which deſigns to make him live here generouſly and according to the dignity of his nature, and in the next world to have that nature ſublimated, and exalted, made more capacious of thoſe refin'd and immenſe felicities, which there await all who will qualify themſelves for them; *who* (as the Apoſtle ſpeaks) *by patient*

continuance in well doing seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life, Rom. 2. 7.

87. But besides the greatest and principal advantages which concern our spiritual interest, it takes in also the care of our secular, directs us to such a managery of our selves, as is naturally apt to promote a quiet and happy life. Its injunction to live peaceable with all men, keeps us out of the way of many misadventures, which turbulent unruly spirits meet with, and so secures our peace. So also as to wealth, it puts us into the fairest road to riches by prescribing diligence in our callings: what is thus got being like sound flesh, which will stick by us; whereas the hasty growth of ill-gotten wealth is but a tumor and impostume, which the bigger it swells, the sooner it bursts and leaves us lanker then before. In like manner it shews us also how to guard our reputation, by *providing honest things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men,* Cor. 8. 28. *by abstaining even from all appearance of evil,* 1 Thes. 5. 22. and *making our light shine before men,* Mat. 5. 16. It provides too for our ease and tranquillity, supersedes our anxious cares and sollicitud's, by directing us to *cast our burden upon the Lord,* Psal. 55. 22. and by a reliance on his providence how to secure to our selves all we really want. Finally it fixes us in all the changes, supports us under all the pressures, com-

comforts us amidſt all the calamities of this life, by aſſuring us they ſhall *all work together for good to thoſe that love God*; Ro. 8. 28.

88. NOR do's the Scripture deſign to promote our intereſts conſider'd only ſingly and perſonally, but alſo in relation to Societies and Communities; it gives us the beſt rules of diſtributive and commutative Juſtice; teaches us to *render to all their dues*, Ro. 13. 7. to keep our words, to obſerve inviolably all our pacts and contracts; nay tho *they prove to our damage*, Pſa. 15. 4. and to preſerve exact fidelity and truth; which are the ſinews of human commerce. It infuſes into us noble and generous principles, to prefer a common good before our private: and that higheſt flight of Ethnic vertue, that of dying for ones Country, is no more then the Scripture preſcribes even for our common brethren, *1 Jo. 3. 16.*

89. BUT beſides theſe generals, it deſcends to more minute directions accommodated to our ſeveral circumſtances; it gives us appropriate rules in reference to our diſtinct relations, whether natural, civil, eccleſiaſtical, or œconomical. And if men would but univerſally conform to them, to what a bleſſed harmony would it tune the world? what order and peace would it introduce? There would then be no oppreſſive Governors, nor mutinous Subjects; no unnatural Parents, nor con-

contumacious Children: no idle Shepherds, or straying Flocks: none of those domestic jars which oft disquiet, and sometimes subvert families: all would be calm and serene; and give us in reality that golden Age, whereof the Poets did but dream.

90. THIS tendency of the Scripture is remarkably acknowledg'd in all our public Judicatories, where before any testimony is admitted, we cause the person that is to give his testimony, first to lay hold of with his hands, then with his mouth to kiss the holy Scriptures: as if it were impossible for those hands, which held the mysteries of Truth, to be immediatly emploi'd in working falsehood; or that those lips which had ador'd those holy Oracles, should be polluted with perjuries and lies. And I fear, the civil Government is exceedingly shaken at this day in its firmest foundation, by the little regard is generally had of the holy Scriptures, and what is consequent thereto, the oaths that are taken upon them.

91. TIS true, we are far remov'd from that state which *Esaiah* prophecied of under the Gospel, tho we have the Bible among us; that when *the Law should go forth of* Sion, *and the Word of the Lord from* Jerusalem, *they should beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks*, Es. 2. 4. but that is not from any defect in it, but from our

our own perverſneſs: *we have it*, but (as the Apoſtle ſpeaks in another ſenſe) *as if we had it not*, 1 Cor. 7. 29. We have it (that is, uſe it) to purpoſes widely different from what it means. Som have it as a *Superſedeas* to all the duty it injoins; and ſo they can but cap texts, talk glibly of Scripture, are not at all concern'd to practice it: ſom have it as their Arſenal, to furniſh them with weapons, not againſt their ſpiritual enemies, but their ſecular: applying all the damnatory ſentences they there find, to all thoſe towhoſe perſons or opinions they have prejudice. And ſom have it as a Scene of their mirth, a topiç of raillery, dreſs their profane and ſcurrilous jeſts in its language; and ſtudy it for no other end but to abuſe it. And whilſt we treat it at this vile rate, no wonder we are never the better for it. For alas, what will it avail us to have the moſt ſoveraign Balſom in our poſſeſſion, if inſtead of applying it to our wounds, we trample it under our feet?

92. BUT tho we may fruſtrate the uſe, we cannot alter the nature of things. Gods deſign in giving us the Scripture was to make us as happy as our nature is capable of being; and the Scripture is excellently adapted to this end: for as to our eternal felicity, all that believe there is any ſuch ſtate, muſt acknowledg the Scripture chalks us out the ready way to it: not only becauſe 'tis dictated

by

by God who infallibly knows it, but also by its prescribing those things which are in themselves best; and which a sober Heathen would adjudg fittest to be rewarded. And as to our temporal happiness, I dare appeal to any unprejudic'd man, whether any thing can contribute more to the peace and real happiness of mankind, then the universal practice of the Scripture rules would do. Would God we would all conspire to make the experiment; and then doubtless, not only our reason, but our sense too would be convinc'd of it.

93. And as the design is thus beneficial, so in the second place is it as extensive also. Time was when the Jews had the inclosure of divine Revelation; when the Oracles of God were their peculiar depositum, and the *Heathen had not the knowledg of his Laws*, Ps. 147. *ult.* but since that by the goodness of God the *Gentiles are* become *fellow-heirs*, Eph. 3. 6. he hath also deliver'd into their hands the deeds and evidences of their future state, given them the holy Scriptures as the exact and authentic registers of the covenant between God and man, and these not to be like the heathen Oracles appropriated to som one or two particular places, so that they cannot be consulted but at the expence of a pilgrimage; but laid open to the view of all that will believe themselves concern'd.

94. It

94. IT was a large commiſſion our Savior gave his Diſciples; *go preach the Goſpel to every creature*, Mar. 16. 15. (which in the narroweſt acception muſt be the Gentile world) and yet their oral Goſpel did not reach farther then the writen: for wherever the Chriſtian Faith was planted, the holy Scriptures were left as the records of it; nay, as the conſervers of it too; the ſtanding rule by which all corruptions were to be detected. 'Tis true, the entire Canon of the New Teſtament, as we now have it, was not all at once deliver'd to the Church; the Goſpels and Epiſtles being ſucceſſively writ, as the needs of Chriſtians, and the encroachments of Heretics gave occaſion: but at laſt they became all together the common magazine of the Church, to furniſh arms both defenſive and offenſive. For as the Goſpel puts in our hands the ſhield of Faith, ſo the Epiſtles help us to hold it, that it may not be wreſted out of our hands again, either by the force of perſecution, or the ſly inſinuations of vice or hereſy.

95. THUS the Apoſtles like prudent leaders have beat up the Ambuſhes, diſcover'd the ſnares that were laid for us; and by diſcomfiting Satans forlorn hope, that earlieſt Set of falſe teachers and corrupt practices which then invaded the Church, have laid a foundation of victory to the ſucceeding Ages,

if they will but keep cloſe to their conduct, adhere to thoſe ſacred Writings they have left behind them in every Church for that purpoſe.

96. Now what was there depoſited, was deſign'd for the benefit of every particular member of that Church. The Bible was not committed (like the *Regalia*, or rarities of a Nation) to be kept under lock and key (and conſequently to conſtitute a profitable office for the keepers) but expos'd like the Brazen Serpent for univerſal view and benefit: that ſacred Book (like the common air) being every mans propriety, yet no mans incloſure: yet there are a generation of men whoſe eies have bin evil, becauſe Gods have bin good: who have ſeal'd up this ſpring, monopoliz'd the word of Life, and will allow none to partake of it but ſuch perſons, and in ſuch proportions as they pleaſe to retail it: an attemt very inſolent in reſpect of God, whoſe purpoſe they contradict; and very injurious in reſpect of man, whoſe advantage they obſtruct. The iniquity of it will be very apparant, if we conſider what is offer'd in the following Section.

SECT.

SECT. IV.

The Custody of the holy Scripture is a privilege and right of the Christian Church, and every member of it; which cannot without impiety to God, and injustice unto it and them, be taken away or empeacht.

BESIDES the keeping of the divine Law, which is obsequious, and imports a due regard to all its Precepts, commonly exprest in Scripture by *keeping the commandments, hearkning to, and obeying the voice of the Lord, walking in his waies, and observing and doing his statutes and his judgments:* there is a possessory keeping it, in reference to our selves and others; in respect whereof, Almighty God, *Deut. 6.* and elsewhere frequently, having enjoin'd the people of *Israel, to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might, and that the words which he commanded them should be in their heart,* he adds, *that they shall teach them diligently to their children, and shall talk of them when they sit down in their houses, and when they walk by the way, and when they lie down, and when they rise up: and that they bind them for a sign upon their hand, and that they shall be as*

frontlets between their eies, and that they shall write them upon the posts of their house, and on their gates. So justly was the Law call'd the Scripture, being writen by them, and worn upon the several parts of the body, inscrib'd upon the walls of their houses, the entrance of their dores and gates of their Cities; and in a word, placed before their eies wherever they convers'd.

2. AND this was granted to the Jews, as matter of privilege and favor. *To them,* saies Saint *Paul,* Rom. 9. 4. *pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law.* And the same Saint *Paul*, at the 3. chap. 2. v. of that Epistle, unto the question, *what advantage hath the Jew, or what profit is there of circumcision*, answers, that it is *much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the Oracles of God.* This *depositum* or trust was granted to the Fathers, that it should be continued down unto their children. *He made a covenant*, saies *David*, Ps. 78. v. 5. *with* Jacob, *and gave* Israel *a Law, which he commanded our Fore-fathers to teach their children, that their posterity might know it, and the children which were yet unborn: to the intent that when they came up, they might shew their children the same.* Which Scripture by a perpetual succession was to be handed down unto the Christian Church; the Apostles on all occasions appealing unto them, as being

read

read in the Synagogues every Sabbath day, Act. 13. 27. and also privatly, in their hands; so that they might at pleasure *search into them*, Jo. 5. 39. Act. 17. 11. Hereupon the Jews are by Saint *Austin* call'd the *Capsarii*, or servants that carried the Christians Books. And *Athanasius* in his Tract of the Incarnation, saies, *The Law was not for the Jews only, nor were the Prophets sent for them alone; but that Nation was the Divinity-Schole of the whole world; from whence they were to fetch the knowledg of God, and the way of spiritual living*: which amounts to what the Apostle saies, Galat. 3. 24. *That the Law was a Schole-master to bring us unto Christ.*

3. AND 'tis observable that the very same word, *Rom.* 3. 2. in the Text even now recited, which expresses the *committing* of the Oracles of God to the Jews, is made use of constantly by Saint *Paul*, when he declares the trust and duty incumbent on him in the preaching of the Gospel: of which, see *1 Cor. 9. 17. Gal. 2. 7. 1 Thes. 2. 4. 1 Tim. 1. 11. Tit. 1. 3.* And therefore, as he saies, *1 Cor. 9. Tho I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me, yea, wo is unto me if I preach not the Gospel, for if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me:* So may all Christians say; if we our selves keep and transmit to our posterities the holy

holy Scriptures, we have nothing to glory of, for a neceſſity is laid upon us, and wo be unto us if we do not our ſelves keep, and tranſmit to our poſterity the holy Scriptures. If we do this thing willingly, we have a reward; but if againſt our will, the cuſtody of the Goſpel, and at leaſt that diſpenſation of it, is committed to us. But if we are Traditors, and give up our Bibles, or take them away from others; let us conſider how black an apoſtacy and ſacrilege we ſhall incur.

4. The Moſaic Law was a temporary conſtitution, and only *a ſhadow of good things to come*, Heb. 10. 1. but the Goſpel being in its duration as well as its intendment, *everlaſting*, *Rev. 14. 6.* and to remain *when time ſhall be no more*, Rev. 10. 6. it is an infinitly more precious *depoſitum*, and ſo with greater care and ſolemner atteſtation to be preſerv'd. Not only the Clergy, or the people of one particular Church, nor the Clergy of the univerſal are intruſted with this care; but 'tis the charge, the privilege and duty of every Chriſtian man, that either is, or was, or ſhall be in the world; even that collective Church which above all competition, *is the pillar and ground of truth*, 1 Tim. 3. 15. againſt which the aſſaults of men and devils, and even the *gates of hell ſhall not prevail*, Mat. 16. 18.

5. The Goſpels were not writen by their holy Pen-men to inſtruct the Apoſtles, but to the

the Chriſtian Church, *that they might believe Jeſus was the Chriſt, the ſon of God, and that believing they might have life thro his name*, Jo. 20. 31. The Epiſtles were not addreſt peculiarly to the Biſhops and Deacons, *but all the holy brethren, to the Churches of God that are ſanctified in Jeſus Chriſt, and to all thoſe that call upon the name of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, Rom. 1, 7. 1 Cor. 1. 2. 2 Cor. 1. 1. Galat. 1. 2. Eph. 1. 1. Col. 4. 16. 1 Theſ. 5. 27. Phil. 1. 1. Jam. 1. 1. 1 Pet. 1. 1. 2 Pet. 1. 1. Revel. 1. 4. Or if by chance ſom one or two of the Epiſtles were addreſt to an Eccleſiaſtic perſon, as thoſe to *Timothy* and *Titus*, their purport plainly refers to the community of Chriſtians, and the *depoſitum* committed to their truſt; *Tim.* 6. 20. And Saint *John* on the other ſide directs his Epiſtles to thoſe who were plainly ſecular; to fathers, young men and little children; and a Lady and her children, Epiſt. 1. chap. 2. 12, 13, 14. and Epiſt. 2. 1. 1.

6. BUT beſides the intereſt which every Chriſtian has in the cuſtody of the Scripture upon the account of its being a *depoſitum* intruſted to him, he has alſo another no leſs forcible; that 'tis the Teſtament of his Savior, by which he becomes a Son of God, *no more a Servant but a Son; and if he be a Son*, it is the Apoſtles inference, that he is *then an heir, an heir of God thro Chriſt*, Gal. 4. 7. Now as he who is heir to an eſtate, is alſo to the deeds

deeds and conveiances thereof; which without injury cannot be detain'd, or if they be, there is a remedy at Law for the recovery of them: So it fares in our Chriſtian inheritance; every believer by the privilege of faith, is made a ſon of *Abraham*, and an heir of the promiſes made unto the fathers, whereby he has an hereditary intereſt in the Old Teſtament; and alſo by the privilege of the ſame Faith he has a firm right to the *purchaſt poſſeſſion*, Eph. 1. 14. and the charter thereof, the New. Therefore the detention of the Scriptures, which are made up of theſe two parts, is a manifeſt injuſtice, and ſacrilegious invaſion of right, which the perſon wrong'd is impower'd, nay, is ſtrictly oblig'd by all lawful means to vindicate.

7. WHICH invaſion of right; will appear more flagrant when the nature and importance of it is conſider'd; which relating to mens ſpiritual intereſt, renders the violation infinitly more injurious then it could be in any ſecular. I might mention ſeveral detriments conſequent to this detention of Scripture, even as many as there are benefits appendant to the free uſe of it; but there is one of ſo fundamental and comprehenſive a nature, that I need name no more; and that is, that it delivers men up to any deluſion their teachers ſhall impoſe upon them, by depriving them of means of detecting them.

Where

Where there is no ſtandard or meſures, 'tis eaſy for men to falſify both; and no leſs eaſy is it to adulterate doctrins, where no recourſe can be had to the primary rule. Now that there is a poſſibility that falſe teachers may ariſe, we have all aſſurance; nay we have the word of Chriſt, and his Apoſtles that it ſhould be ſo: and all Eccleſiaſtic Story to atteſt it has bin ſo. And if in the firſt and pureſt times (thoſe Ages of more immediat illumination) the *God of this world* found inſtruments whereby to *blind mens minds*, 2 Cor. 4. 4. it cannot be ſuppos'd impoſſible or improbable he ſhould do ſo now.

8. BUT to leave generals, and to ſpeak to the caſe of that Church which magiſterially prohibits Scripture to the vulgar: ſhe manifeſtly ſtands liable to that charge of our Savior, Luk. 11. 52. *Ye have taken away the key of knowledg*: and by allowing the common people no more Scripture then what ſhe affords them in their Sermons and privat Manuals, keeps it in her power to impoſe on them what ſhe pleaſes. For 'tis ſure thoſe portions ſhe ſelects for them, ſhall be none of thoſe which claſh with the doctrins ſhe recommends: and when ever ſhe will uſe this power to the corrupting their faith or worſhip (yea, or their manners either) they muſt brutiſhly ſubmit to it, becauſe they cannot bring her dictats to the teſt.

9. But 'twill be ſaid, this danger ſhe wards by her doctrin of infallibility: that is, ſhe enervates a probable ſuppoſition atteſted by event, by an impoſſible one confuted by event. For 'tis certain, that all particular Churches may err; and tho the conſciouſneſs of that, forces the Roman Church upon the abſurd pretence of univerſality, to aſſert her infallibillity; yet alas, *Tyber* may as well call it ſelf the Ocean, or *Italy* the world, as the Roman Church may name it ſelf the univerſal; whileſt 'tis ſo apparent that far the leſs part of Chriſtians are under her communion. And if ſhe be but a particular Church, ſhe has no immunity from errors, nor thoſe under her from having thoſe errors (how pernicious ſoever) impos'd upon them. As to her having actually err'd, and in diverſe particulars, the proof of that has bin the work of ſo many Volumes, that 'twould be impertinent here to undertake it: I ſhall only inſtance in that of Image-Worſhip; a practice perfectly irreconcileable with the ſecond Commandment; and doubtleſs, clearly diſcern'd by her to be ſo: upon which account it is, that tho by Tranſlations and Paraphraſes ſhe wreſts and moulds other Texts to comply with her doctrins, yet ſhe dares not truſt to thoſe arts for this: but takes a more compendious courſe, and expunges the Commandment; as is evident in her Catechiſms

and

and other Manuals. Now a Church that can thus sacrilegiously purloin one Commandment (and such a one as God has own'd himself the most jealously concern'd in) and to delude her children split another to make up the number, may as her needs require, substract and divide what others she please: and then whilst all resort to Scripture is obstructed; how fatal a hazard must those poor souls run, who are oblig'd to follow these blind, or rather these winking guides into the ditch?

10. BUT all these criminations she retorts by objecting the dangers of allowing the Scriptures to the vulgar, which she accuses as the spring of all Sects, Schisms, and Heresies. To which I answer first, that supposing this were true, 'twas certainly foreseen by God, who notwithstanding laid no restraint; probably as fore-seeing, that the dangers of implicit faith (to which such a restraint must subject men) would be far greater: and if God saw fit to indulge the liberty, those that shall oppose it, must certainly think they do not only partake, but have transplanted infallibility from God to themselves.

11. BUT secondly, 'tis not generally true, that Sects, Schisms, and Heresies are owing to this liberty: All Ecclesiastical Story shews us that they were not the illiterat Lay-men, but the learned Clarks who were usually the broachers of Heresies. And indeed many of

them were so subtil and aerial, as could never have bin forg'd in grosser brains; but were founded not on Scripture merely mistaken, but rackt and distorted with nice criticisms, and quirks of Logic, as several of the Ancients complain: som again sprang from that ambition of attaining, or impatience of missing Ecclesiastical dignities: which appropriates them to the Clergy. So that if the abuse infer a forfeiture of the use, the Learned have of all others the least title to the Scriptures; and perhaps those who now ingross them, the least title of all the Learned.

12. On the other side, Church-story indeed mentions som lay-propugners of Heresies; but those for the most part were either so gross and bestial; as disparag'd and confuted themselves and Authors, and rose rather from the brutish inclination of the men, then from their mistakes of Scripture: or else they were by the immediat infusion of the devil, who backt his heretical suggestions with sorceries and lying wonders, as in *Simon Magus*, *Menander*, *&c.* And for later times, tho somtimes there happens among the vulgar a few pragmatic spirits, that love to tamper with the obscurest Texts, and will undertake to expound before they understand; yet that is not their common temper: the generality are rather in the other extreme, stupid and unobservant even of the plainest doctrins,

And

And if to this be objected the multitude of Quakers and Fanatics, who generally are of the ignorant sort; I answer, that 'tis manifest the first propugners of those tenets in *Germany* were not seduc'd into them by mistakes of Scripture, but industriously form'd them, at once to disguise and promote their villainous designs of sedition and rapine: and as for those amongst us, it is not at all certain that their first errors were their own productions: there are vehement presumtions that the seeds were sown by greater Artificers; whose first business was to unhinge them from the Church, and then to fill their heads with strange Chimera's of their priviledges and prefections; and by that intoxication of spiritual pride, dispose them for all deludions: and thereby render them, like *Samsons* Foxes, fit instruments to set all in combustion.

13. BUT admit this were but a conjecture, and that they were the sole Authors of their own frenzy; how appears it that the liberty of reading the Scripture was the cause of it? Had these men bin of the Romish communion, and so bin interdicted privat reading, yet som broken parts of Scripture would have bin in Sermons and Books of devotion communicated to them; had it not bin as possible for them to have wrested what they heard as what they read? In one respect it seems rather

ther more likely: for in thoſe looſe and incidental quotations the connexion is ſometimes not ſo diſcernable: and many Texts there are whoſe ſenſe is ſo interwoven with the context, that without conſulting that, there may be very pernicious miſtakes: on which account it is probably more ſafe that the Auditor ſhould have Bibles to conſult. So that this reſtraint of Scripture is a very fallible expedient of the infallible Church. And indeed themſelves have in event found it ſo; for if it were ſo ſoveraign a prophylactic against error, how comes it to paſs that ſo many of their members who were under that diſcipline have revolted from them into that which they call hereſy? If they ſay, the defection was made by ſom of the Learned to whom the Scripture was allow'd, why do they not (according to their way of arguing) take it from them alſo upon that experiment of its miſchief, and confine it only to the enfallible chair? but if they own them to have bin unlearn'd (as probably the Albigenſes and Waldenſes, *&c.* were) they may ſee how inſignificant a guard this reſtraint is againſt error: and learn how little is got by that policy which controles the divine Wiſdom.

14. NOR can they take ſhelter in the example of the primitive Chriſtians: for they in the conſtant uſe of the holy Scriptures yielded not unto the Jews. Whereas the Jews had

the Scriptures read publicly to them every Sabbath day; which *Josephus* against *Appion* thus expresses: *Moses propounded to the Jews the most excellent and necessary learning of the Law; not by hearing it once or twice, but every seventh day laying aside their works, he commanded them to assemble for the hearing of the Law, and throughly and exactly to learn it.* Parallel to this was the practice of the primitive Church, perform'd by the Lector, or Reader, of which *Justin Martyr* in his 2. Apol. gives this account. *On the day call'd Sunday, all that abide in towns or the countries about, meet in one place, and the writings of the Apostles and Prophets are read, so far as there is place.* So *Tertullian* in his *Apol.* describing the offices in the public Assemblies: *We feed our faith with the sacred Words, we raise our hopes, and establish our reliance.*

15. And as the Jews thought it indecent for persons professing piety, to let three daies pass without the offices thereof in the congregation; and therefore met in their Synagogues upon every Tuesday and Thnrsday in the week, and there perform'd the duties of fasting, praier, and hearing the holy Scriptures; concerning which is the boast of the Pharisee, *Luk. 18. 12.* in conformity hereto the Christians also, their Sabbath being brought forward from the Saturday to the day following; that the like number of daies might not pass them without performing the afore-

aforesaid duties in the congregation; met together on the Wednesdaies and Fridaies, which were the daies of Station, so frequently mention'd in *Tertullian*, and others, the first writers of the Church. *Tertullian* expresly saies, that the Christians dedicated to the offices of Piety, *the fourth and sixth day of the week:* and *Clemens Alex.* saies of the Christians, that *they understood the secret reasons of their weekly fasts, to wit, those of the fourth day of the week, and that of preparation before the Sabbath; commonly call'd Wednesday and Friday.* Where, by the way, we may take notice what ground there is for the observation of the Wednesday and Friday in our Church, and the Litanies then appointed, so much neglected in this profligate Age.

16. BUT secondly, as the Jews were diligent in the privat reading of the Scripture; being taught it from their infancy. which custom Saint *Paul* refers to 1 *Tim. 3. 15.* whereof *Josephus* against *Appion* saies, *That if a man ask any Jew concerning the Laws, he will tell every thing readier then his name: for learning them from the first time they have sense of any thing, they retain them imprinted in their minds.* So were the first Christians equally industrious in improving their knowledg of divine Truth. *The whole life of a Christian:* saies *Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 7. is a holy solemnity, there his sacrifices are praiers and praises; before*

fore every meal he has the readings of the holy Scriptures; and Psalms, and Hymns at the time of his meals. Which *Tertullian* also describes in his Apol. and Saint *Cyprian* in the end of the Epist. to *Donatus.*

17. AND this is farther evidenc'd by the early and numerous versions of the Scriptures into all vulgar Languages; concerning which *Theodoret* speaks in his Book of the Cure of the Affections of the Greeks, Serm. 5. *We Christians* (saies he) *are enabled to shew the power of Apostolic and prophetic doctrins, which have fill'd all Countries under Heaven. For that which was formerly utter'd in Hebrew, is not only translated into the Language of the Gretians, but also the Romans, Egyptians, Persians, Indians, Armenians, Scythians, Samaritans; and in a word to all the Languages that are us'd by any Nation.* The same is said by Saint *Chrysostom* in his first Homily upon Saint *John.*

18. NOR was this don by the blind zeal of inconsiderable men, but the most eminent Doctors of the Church were concern'd herein: such as *Origen,* who with infinit labor contriv'd the Hexapla. Saint *Chrysostom,* who translated the New Testament, Psalms, and som part of the Old Testament into the Armenian Tongue, as witnesses *Geor. Alex.* in the life of *Chrysost.* So *Ulphilas* the first Bishop of the Goths translated the holy Scripture into the Gothic; as *Socrat. Eccl. Hist. l. 4. cap. 33.*

and others testify. Saint *Jerom*, who translated them not only into Latin from the Hebrew, the Old Italic version having bin from the Greek; but also into his native vulgar Dalmatic: which he saies himself in his Epistle to *Sophronius*.

19. BUT the peoples having them for their privat and constant use, appears farther by the Heathens making the extorting of them a part of their persecution: and when diverse did faint in that trial, and basely surrender'd them, we find the Church level'd her severity only against the offending persons, did not (according to the Romish equity) punish the innocent, by depriving them of that sacred Book, because the others had so unworthily prostituted it (tho the prevention of such a profanation for the future had bin as fair a plea for it as the Romanists do now make:) but on the contrary the primitive Fathers are frequent, nay indeed importunat in their exhortations to the privat study of holy Scripture, which they recommend to Christians of all Ranks, Ages, and Sexes.

20. As an instance hereof let us hear *Clemens* of *Alex.* in his Exhort. The Word, saies he, *is not hid from any, it is a common light that shineth to all men; there is no obscurity in it; hear it you that be far off, and hear it you that are nigh.*

21. To

21. To this purpose St. *Jerom* speaks in his Epistle to *Leta*, whom he directs in the education of her young daughter, and advises, *that instead of gems and silk, she be enamour'd with the holy Scripture; wherein not gold, or skins, or Babylonian embroideries, but a correct and beautiful variety producing faith, will recommend its self. Let her first learn the Psalter, and be entertain'd with those songs; then be instructed unto life by the Proverbs of* Solomon: *let her learn from* Ecclesiastes *to despise worldly things; transcribe from* Job *the practice of patience and vertue: let her pass then to the Gospels, and never let them be out of her hands: and then imbibe with all the faculties of the mind, the Acts of the Apostles, and Epistles. When she has enrich'd the store-house of her breast with these tresures, let her learn the Prophets, the Heptateuch, or books of* Moses, Joshua *and* Judges, *the books of* Kings *and* Chronicles, *the volumes of* Ezra *and* Esther; *and lastly the* Canticles. And indeed, this Father is so concern'd to have the unletter'd female sex skilful in the Scriptures, that tho he sharply rebukes their pride and over-wening; he not only frequently resolves their doubts concerning difficult places in the said Scriptures, but dedicates several of his Commentaries to them.

22. THE same is to be said of Saint *Austin*, who in his Epistles to unletter'd Laics, en-

courages their enquiries concerning the Scripture, assuring *Volusianus* Ep. 3. *that it speaks those things that are plain to the heart of the learned and unlearned, as a familiar friend; in the mysterious, mounts not up into high phrases which might deter a slow and unlearned mind, (as the poor are in their addresses to the rich;) but invites all with lowly speech, feeding with manifest truth, and exercising with secret.* And *Ep. 1. 21.* tells the devout *Proba*, that *in this world, where we are absent from the Lord, and walk by faith and not by sight, the soul is to think it self desolate, and never cease from praier, and the words of divine and holy Scripture*, &c.

23. SAINT *Chrysostom* in his third Homily of *Lazarus* thus addresses himself to *married persons, house-holders, and people engag'd in trades and secular professions*; telling them, *that the reading of the Scripture is a great defensative against sin; and on the other side, the ignorance thereof is a deep and head-long precipice; that not to know the Law of God, is the utter loss of salvation; that this has caus'd heresies, and corruption of life, and has confounded the order of things: for it cannot be by any means, that his labor should be fruitless, who emploies himself in a daily and attentive reading of the Scripture.*

24. *I am not*, saies the same St. *Chry. Hom. 9. on Colos. 3. a Monk, I have wife and children,* and

and the cares of a family. But 'tis a deſtructive opinion, that the reading of the Scripture pertains only to thoſe who have addicted themſelves to a monaſtic life; when the reading of Scripture is much more neceſſary for ſecular perſons: for they who converſe abroad, and receive frequent wounds, are in greateſt need of remedies and preſervatives. So Hom. 2. on Mat. *Hearken all you that are ſecular, how you ought to order your wives and children; and how you are particularly enjoin'd to read the Scriptures, and that not perfunctorily, or by chance, but very diligently.*

25. LIKEWISE *Hom.* 3. on *Laz. What ſaieſt thou, O man? it is not thy buſineſs to turn over the Scripture, being diſtracted by innumerable cares; no, thou haſt therefore the greater obligation: others do not ſo much ſtand in need of the aids of the Scripture, as they who are converſant in much buſineſs.* Farther, *Hom.* 8. on *Heb.* 5. *I beſeech you neglect not the reading of the Scriptures; but whether we comprehend the meaning of what is ſpoken or not, let us alwaies be converſant in them: for daily meditation ſtrengthens the memory; and it frequently happens, that what you now cannot find out, if you attemt it again, you will the next day diſcover: for God of his goodneſs will enlighten the mind.* It were endleſs to tranſcribe all the Exhortations of the ancient Doctors and Fathers of the Church; they not only permitted, but earneſtly preſt upon all Chriſtians, whatever their eſtate

estate or condition were, the constant reading of the holy Scripture. Nor indeed was their restraint ever heard of till the Church of *Rome* had espous'd such doctrins as would not bear the test of Scripture: and then as those who deal in false wares are us'd to do, they found it necessary to proportion their lights accordingly.

26. THIS *Peter Sutor* in his second Book cap. 22. of the Translation of the Scripture honestly confesses, saying, *that whereas many things are enjoin'd which are not expresly in Scripture, the unlearned observing this, will be apt to murmur and complain that so heavy burthens are laid upon them, and their Christian liberty infring'd. They will easily be with-drawn from observing the Constitutions of the Church, when they find that they are not contain'd in the Law of Christ.* And that this was not a frivolous suggestion, the desperat attemt of the Romanists above mention'd, in leaving out the second Commandment in their Primers and Catechisms which they communicate to the people, may pass for an irrefragable evidence; For what Lay-man would not be shockt, to find Almighty God command, *not to make any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth; that no one should bow down to them, nor worship them:* when he sees the contrary is practic'd and commanded by the Church.

27. BUT

27. BUT would God none but the Romaniſt were impeachable of this detention of Scripture: there are too many among us that are thus falſe and envious to themſelves: and what the former do upon policy and pretence of reverence, thoſe do upon mere oſcitancy and avow'd profaneſs; which are much worſe inducements. And for ſuch as theſe to declaim againſt detention of the Scripture, is like the Law-ſuits of thoſe who contend only about ſuch little punctilio's as themſelves deſign no advantage from, but only the worſting their Adverſaries: and it would be much ſafer for them to lie under the interdict of others, then thus to reſtrain themſelves: even as much as the errors of obedience are more excuſable, then thoſe of contemt and profaneſs.

28. AND here I would have it ſeriouſly conſider'd that the Edict of *Diocletian* for the demoliſhing the Chriſtian Churches, and the burning their Bibles; became the character and particular aggravation of his moſt bloudy perſecution. Now ſhould Almighty God call us to the like trial, ſhould Antichriſtian violence, whether heathen or other, take from us our Churches and our Bibles, what comfort could we have in that calamity, if our contemt of thoſe bleſſings drove them from us; nay, prevented perſecution, and bereft us of them even whilſt we had them in our

our power? He who neglects to make his conſtant reſort unto the Church, which by Gods mercy now ſtands open; or to read diligently the holy Scriptures, which by the ſame divine Goodneſs are free for him to uſe, is his own *Diocletian*; and without the terrors of death, or torments, has renounc'd, if not the Faith, the great inſtruments of its conveiance, and pledg of God Almighties preſence among the ſons of men.

29. BUT what if men either upon the one motive or the other, will not read; yet the Scriptures continue ſtill moſt worthy to be read: they retain ſtill their propriety for all thoſe excellent ends to which God deſign'd them: and as the Prophet tells the Jews, *Ez. 2. 5. whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, they ſhall know there has bin a Prophet among them*; ſo whether we will take the benefit or no, we ſhall one day find that the holy Scriptures would have made us *wiſe unto ſalvation*. If thro our fault alone they fail to do ſo, they will one day aſſume a leſs grateful office; and from guides and aſſiſtants, become accuſers and witneſſes againſt us.

SECT.

SECT. V.

The Scripture has great propriety and fitneſs toward the attainment of its excellent end.

WE are now in the next place to conſider how exactly the holy Scriptures are adapted to thoſe great ends to which they are directed: how ſufficient they are for that important negotiation on which they are ſent: and that we ſhall certainly find them, if we look on them either intrinſecally, or circumſtantially. For the firſt of theſe notions we need only to reflect on the third Part of this diſcourſe, where the Scripture in reſpect of the ſubject Matter is evinc'd to be a ſyſtem of the moſt excellent Laws, backt with the moſt tranſcendent rewards and puniſhments; and the certainty of thoſe confirm'd by ſuch pregnant inſtances of Gods mercies and vengeance in this world, as are the ſureſt gages and earneſts of what we are bid to expect in another.

2. NOW what method imaginable can there be uſed to rational creatures of more force and energy? Nay it ſeems to deſcend

even to our passions and accommodates it self to our several inclinations. And seeing how few Proselytes there are to bare and naked vertue, and how many to interest and advantage; God closes with them upon their own terms, and do's not so much injoin as buy those little services he asks from us.

3. BUT because som mens natures are so disingenuous as to hate to be oblig'd no less then to be reform'd, the Scripture has goads and scourges to drive such beasts as will not be led; terrors and threatnings, and those of most formidable sorts, to affright those who will not be allur'd. Nay lest incredulous men should question the reality of future rewards or punishments, the Scripture gives as sensible evidence of them as we are capable of receiving in this world; by regiſtring such signal protections and judgments proportion'd to vertue and vice, as sufficiently attests the Psalmists Axiom: *Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth,* Psal. 58. 11. and leaves nothing to the impenitent sinner, but a *fearful expectation of that fiery indignation* threatned hereafter; *Heb. 10. 27.*

4. AND now methinks the Scripture seems to be that *net* our Savior speaks of, *that caught of every sort,* Mat. 13. 47. it is of so vast a compass, that it must, one would think, fetch in all kind of tempers: and sure had we not mixt natures with fiends, contracted som of their

their malice and obſtinacy, mere human pravity could not hold out.

5. AND as the holy Scripture is thus fitly proportion'd to its end in reſpect of the ſubject matter, ſo is it alſo in reference to its circumſtances, which all conſpire to render it, *the power of God unto ſalvation*, Ro. 1. 16. In the firſt rank of thoſe we muſt place its divine original, which ſtamps it with an uncontroulable autority; and is an infallible ſecurity that the matter of it is perfectly true: ſince it proceeds from that eſſential verity which cannot abuſe us with fraudulent promiſes or threatnings: and from that infinite power that cannot be impeded in the execution of what he purpoſes.

6. YET to render this circumſtance efficacious there needs another; to wit, that its being the word of God be ſufficiently teſtifi'd to us: and we have in the fore-going diſcourſe evinced it to be ſo; and that in the utmoſt degree that a matter of that kind is capable of, beyond which no ſober man will require evidence in any thing. And certainly theſe two circumſtances thus united, have a mighty force to impreſs the dictats of Scripture on us. And we muſt rebel againſt God and our own convictions too, to hold out againſt it.

7. A third circumſtance relates to the frame and compoſure of this divine Book,

both as to method, and ſtile: concerning which I have already made ſom reflexions. But now that I may ſpeak more diſtinctly, I obſerve it takes its riſe from the firſt point of time wherein 'twas poſſible for mankind to be concern'd; and ſo gradually proceeds to its fall and renovation: ſhews us firſt our need of a Redeemer, and then points us out who it is by types and promiſes in the Old Teſtament, and by way of hiſtory and completion in the New. In the former it acquaints us with that pedagogy of the Law which God deſign'd as our *Schole-maſter to bring us to Chriſt*, Gal. 3. 25. and in the Goſpel ſhews us yet a more excellent way; preſents us with thoſe more ſublime elevated doctrins, which Chriſt came down from heaven to revele.

8. As for the ſtile, that is full of grateful variety, ſomtimes high and majeſtic, as becomes that *high and holy one that inhabiteth eternity*, Eſai. 57. 15. and ſomtimes ſo humble and after the manner of men, as agrees to the other part of his Character, *his dwelling is with him that is of an humble ſpirit*, Eſay 57. 15. I know profane wits are apt to brand this as an unevenneſs of ſtile: but they may as well accuſe the various notes of Muſic as deſtructive to harmony, or blame an Orator for being able to tune his tongue to the moſt different ſtrains.

9. And

9. ANOTHER excellency of the ſtile, is its propriety to the ſeveral ſubjects it treats of. When it ſpeaks of ſuch things as God would not have men pry into, it wraps them up in clouds and thick darkneſs; by that means to deter inquiſitive man (as he did at *Sinai*) from breaking into the mount, *Ex.* 20. And that he gives any intimation at all of ſuch, ſeems deſign'd only to give us a juſt eſtimate how ſhallow our comprehenſions are; and excite us to adore and admire that Abyſs of divine Wiſdom which we can never fathom.

10. THINGS of a middle nature, which may be uſeful to ſom, but are not indiſpenſibly neceſſary to all, the Scripture leaves more acceſſible; yet not ſo obvious as to be within every mans reach: but makes them only the prize of induſtry, praier, and humble endevors. And it is no ſmall benefit, that thoſe who covet the knowledg of divine Truth, are by it engag'd to take theſe vertues in the way. Beſides there is ſo much time requir'd to that ſtudy, as renders it inconſiſtent with thoſe ſecular buſineſſes wherein the generality of men are immerſt: and conſequently 'tis neceſſary that thoſe who addict themſelves to the one, have competent vacancy from the other: And in this it hath a viſible uſe by being very contributive to the maintaining that ſpiritual ſubordination of the people

people to the Pastors; which God has establish'd. *Miriam* and *Corahs* Partisans are a pregnant instance how much the opinion of equal knowledg unfits for subjection: and we see by sad experience how much the bare pretence of it has disturb'd the Church, and made those turn preachers who never were understanding hearers.

11. But besides these more abstruse, there are easier truths in which every man is concern'd; the explicit knowledg whereof is necessary to all: I mean the divine Rules for saving Faith and Manners. And in those the Scripture stile is as plain as is possible: condescends to the apprehensions of the rudest capacities: so that none that can read the Scripture but will there find the way to bliss evidently chalk'd out to him. That I may use the words of Saint *Gregory*, *the Lamb may wade in those waters of life, as well as the Elephant may swim. The Holy Ghost*, as St. *Austin* tells us, lib. 2. of Christian doctrin, cap. 6. *has made in the plainer places of Scripture magnificent and healthful provision for our hunger; and in the obscure, against satiety. For there are scarce any things drawn from obscure places, which in others are not spoken most plainly.* And he farther adds, *that if any thing happen to be no where explain'd, every man may there abound in his own sense.*

12. So again, in the same Book, cap. 9. he

he ſaies, *that all thoſe things which concern Faith and Manners, are plainly to be met with in the Scripture:* and Saint *Jerom* in his Comment on *Eſ.* 19. tells us, *that 'tis the cuſtom of the Scripture to cloſe obſcure ſayings with thoſe that are eaſy; and what was firſt expreſt darkly, to propoſe in evident words:* which very thing is ſaid likewiſe by Saint *Chryſoſtom*, *Hom.* 9. 2 *Cor.* 4. 11. who in his firſt homily on Saint *Mat.* farther declares, *that the Scriptures are eaſy to be underſtood, and expos'd to vulgar capacities.*

13. He ſaies again, Hom. upon *Eſay*, *that the Scriptures are not mettals that require the help of Miners, but afford a treſure eaſily to be had to them that ſeek the riches contain'd in them. It is enough only to ſtoop down, and look upon them, and depart repleniſh'd with wealth; it is enough only to open them, and behold the ſplendor of thoſe Gems.* Again, Hom. 3. on the ſecond Ep. to the Theſſ. 2. *All things are evident and ſtrait, which are in the holy Scripture; whatever is neceſſary is manifeſt.* So alſo Hom. 3. on *Gen.* 14. *It cannot be that he who is ſtudious in the holy Scripture ſhould be rejected: for tho the inſtruction of men be wanting, the Lord from above will inlighten our minds, ſhine in upon our reaſon, revele what is ſecret, and teach what we do not know.* So Hom. 1. on *Jo.* 11. *Almighty God involves his doctrin with no miſts, and darkneſs, as did the Philoſophers: his doctrin*

ctrin is brighter then the Sun-beams, and more illustrious; and therefore every where diffus'd: and Hom. 6. on *Jo.* 11. *His doctrin is so facile, that not only the wise, but even women, and youths must comprehend it.* Hom. 13. on *Gen.* 2. *Let us go to the Scripture as our Mark, which is its own interpreter.* And soon after saies, that *the Scripture interprets it self, and suffers not its Auditor to err.* To the same purpose saies *Cyril* in his third Book against *Julian. In the Scripture nothing is difficult to them, who are conversant in them as they ought to be.*

14. It is therefore a groundless cavil which men make at the obscurity of the Scripture; since it is not obscure in those things wherein 'tis our common interest it should be plain: which sufficiently justifies its propriety to that great end of *making us wise unto salvation.* And for those things which seem less intelligible to us, many of them become so, not by the innate obscurity of the Text, but by extrinsic circumstances (of which perhaps the over-busy tampering of Paraphrasts, pleased with new notions of their own, may be reckon'd for one.) But this subject the Reader may find so well pursued in Mr. *Boyls* Tract concerning the stile of Scripture, that I shall be kindest both to him and it to refer him thither; as also for answer to those other querulous objections which men galled with the sense of the Scripture, have made to its stile.

15. A

15. A third circumſtance in which the Scripture is fitted to attain its end, is its being committed to writing, as that is diſtinguiſh'd from oral delivery. It is moſt true, the word of God is of equal autority and efficacy which way ſoever it be deliver'd: The Sermons of the Apoſtles were every jot as divine and powerful out of their mouths, as they are now in their ſtory. All the advantage therefore that the writen Word can pretend to, is in order to its perpetuity, as it is a ſecurer way of derivation to poſterity, then that of oral Tradition. To evince that it is ſo, I ſhall firſt weigh the rational probabilities on either ſide. Secondly, I ſhall conſider to which God himſelf appears in Scripture to give the deference.

16. FOR the firſt of theſe, I ſhall propoſe this conſideration, which I had occaſion to intimate before, that the Bible being writ for the univerſal uſe of the faithful, twas as univerſally diſperſt amongſt them: The Jews had the Law not only in their Synagogues, but in their privat houſes, and as ſoon as the Evangelical Books were writ, they were ſcatter'd into all places where the Chriſtian Faith had obtain'd. Now when there was ſuch a vaſt multitude of copies, and thoſe ſo revered by the poſſeſſors, that they thought it the higheſt pitch of ſacrilege to expoſe them, it muſt ſurely be next to impoſſible, entirely to

ſuppreſs that Book. Beſides, it could never be attemted but by ſom eminent violence, as it was by the heathen Perſecutors; which (according to the common effect of oppoſition) ſerv'd to enhance the Chriſtians value of the Bible; and conſequently when the ſtorm was paſt, to excite their diligence for recruiting the number. So that, unleſs in after Ages, all the Chriſtians in the world ſhould at once make a voluntary defection, and conſpire to eradicate their Religion, the Scriptures could not be utterly extinguiſh'd.

17. AND that which ſecures it from total ſuppreſſion, dō's in a great degree do ſo from corruption and falſification. For whileſt ſo many genuine copies are extant in all parts of the world, to be appeal'd to, it would be a very difficult matter to impoſe a ſpurious one; eſpecially if the change were ſo material as to awaken mens jealouſies. And it muſt be only in a place and age of groſs ignorance, that any can be daring enough to attemt it. And if it ſhould happen to ſucceed in ſuch a particular Church, yet what is that to the univerſal? And to think to have the forgery admitted there, is (as a learned man ſaies) like attemting to poiſon the ſea.

18. ON the other ſide, oral Tradition ſeems much more liable to hazards, error may there inſinuate it ſelf much more inſenſibly. And tho there be no univerſal conſpiracy

racy to admit it at firſt; yet like a ſmall eruption of waters, it widens its own paſſage, till it cauſe an inundation. There is no impreſſion ſo deep, but time and intervening accidents may wear out of mens minds; eſpecially where the notions are many and are founded not in nature, but poſitive inſtitution, as a great part of Chriſtian Religion is. And when we conſider the various tempers of men, 'twill not be ſtrange that ſucceeding Ages will not alwaies be determin'd by the Traditions of the former. Som are pragmatic, and think themſelves fitter to preſcribe to the belief of their poſterity, then to follow that of their Anceſtors: ſom have intereſts and deſigns which will be better ſerv'd by new Tenets: and ſom are ignorant and miſtaking, and may unawares corrupt the doctrin they ſhould barely deliver: and of this laſt ſort we may gueſs there may be many, ſince it falls commonly to the mothers lot to imbue children with the firſt rudiments.

19. Now in all theſe caſes how poſſible is it that primitive Tradition may be either loſt or adulterated? and conſequently, and in proportion to that poſſibility, our confidence of it muſt be ſtagger'd. I am ſure according to the common eſtimate in ſeculars it muſt be ſo. For I appeal to any man whether he be not apter to credit a relation which

comes from an eie-witneſs then at the third or fourth, much more at the hundredth rebound: (as in this caſe.) And daily experience tells us; that a true and probable ſtory by paſſing thro many hands, often grows to an improbable lie. This man thinks he could add one becoming circumſtance; that man another: and whilſt moſt men take the liberty to do ſo, the relation grows as monſtrous as ſuch a heap of incoherent phancies can make it.

20. If to this it be ſaid, that this happens only in trivial ſecular matters, but that in the weighty concern of Religion mankind is certainly more ſerious and ſincere: I anſwer that 'tis very improbable that they are; ſince 'tis obvious in the common practice of the world, that the intereſts of Religion are poſtpon'd to every little worldly concern. And therefore when a temporal advantage requires the bending and warping of Religion, there will never be wanting ſom that will attemt it.

21. Besides, there is ſtill left in human nature ſo much of the venom of the Serpents firſt temtation, that tho men cannot be as God, yet they love to be preſcribing to him, and to be their own Aſſeſſors as to that worſhip and homage they are to pay him.

22. But above all 'tis conſiderable that in

in this caſe Sathan has a more peculiar concern, and can ſerve himſelf more by a falſification here then in temporal affairs. For if he can but corrupt Religion, it ceaſes to be his enemy, and becomes one of his moſt uſeful engins, as ſufficiently appear'd in the rites of the heathen worſhip. We have therefore no cauſe to think this an exemt caſe; but to preſume it may be influenc'd by the ſame pravity of human nature, which prevailes in others; and conſequently are oblig'd to bleſs God that he has not left our ſpiritual concerns to ſuch hazards, but has lodg'd them in a more ſecure repoſitory, the writen Word.

23. BUT I fore-ſee 'twill be objected, that whilſt I thus diſparage Tradition, I do vertually invalidate the Scripture it ſelf, which comes to us upon its credit. To this I anſwer firſt that ſince God has with-drawn immediate revelation from the world, Tradition is the only means to convey to us the firſt notice that this Book is the word of God: and it being the only means he affords, we have all reaſon to depend on his goodneſs, that he will not ſuffer that to be evacuated to us: and that how liable ſoever Tradition may be to err, yet that it ſhall not actually err in this particular.

24. BUT in the ſecond place; This Tradition ſeems not ſo liable to falſification as o-

thers

thers: It is ſo very ſhort and ſimple a propoſition; ſuch and ſuch writings are the word of God, that there is no great room for Sophiſtry or miſtake to pervert the ſenſe; the only poſſible deception muſt be to change the ſubject, and obtrude ſuppoſitious writings in room of the true, under the title of the word of God. But this has already appear'd to be unpracticable, becauſe of the multitude of copies which were diſperſt in the world; by which ſuch an attemt would ſoon have bin detected. There appears therefore more reaſon as well as more neceſſity, to rely upon Tradition in this, then in moſt other particulars.

25. NEITHER yet do I ſo farr decry oral Tradition in any, as to conclude it impoſſible it ſhould derive any truth to poſterity: I only look on it as more caſual; and conſequently a leſs fit conveiance of the moſt important and neceſſary verities then the writen Word: In which I conceive my ſelf juſtifi'd by the common ſenſe of mankind; who uſe to commit thoſe things to writing, which they are moſt ſolicitous to derive to poſterity. Do's any Nation truſt their fundamental Laws only to the memory of the preſent Age, and take no other courſe to tranſmit them to the future? do's any man purchaſe an eſtate, and leave no way for his children to lay claim to it, but the Tradition the preſent witneſſes ſhall leave of it? Nay do's any conſidering

ſidering man ordinarily make any important pact or bargain (tho without relation to poſterity) without putting the Articles in writing? And whence is all this caution but from a univerſal conſent that writing is the ſureſt way of tranſmitting?

26. BUT we have yet a higher appeal in this matter then to the ſuffrage of men: God himſelf ſeems to have determin'd it; And what his deciſion is, 'tis our next buſineſs to inquire.

27. AND firſt he has given the moſt real and comprehenſive atteſtation to this way of writing, by having himſelf choſe it. For he is too wiſe to be miſtaken in his eſtimate of better and worſe, and too kind to chuſe the worſt for us: and yet he has choſen to communicate himſelf to the latter Ages of the world by writing; and has ſumm'd up all the Eternal concerns of makniud in the ſacred Scriptures, and left thoſe ſacred Records by which we are to be both inform'd and govern'd; which if oral Tradition would infallibly have don, had bin utterly needleſs: and God ſure is not ſo prodigal of his ſpirit, as to inſpire the Authors of Scripture to write that, whoſe uſe was ſuperſeded by a former more certain expedient.

28. NAY, under the Moſaic œconomy, when he made uſe of other waies of reveling himſelf, yet to perpetuate the memory even of

of those Revelations, he chose to have them writen. At the delivery of the Law, God spake then *vivâ voce*, and with that pomp of dreadful solemnity, as certainly was apt to make the deepest impressions; yet God fore-saw that thro every succeeding Age that stamp would grow more dim, and in a long revolution might at last be extinct. And therefore how warm soever the Israelites apprehensions then were, he would not trust to them for the perpetuating his Law, but committed it to writing; *Ex. 31. 18.* nay wrote it twice himself.

29. YET farther even the ceremonial Law, tho not intended to be of perpetual obligation, was not yet referr'd to the traditionary way, but was wrote by *Moses*, and deposited with the Priests, *Deut. 31. 9.* And after-event shew'd this was no needless caution. For when under *Manasses*, Idolatry had prevail'd in *Jerusalem*, it was not by any dormant Tradition, but by the Book of the Law found in the Temple, that *Josiah* was both excited to reform Religion, and instructed how to do it; *2 Kings 22. 10.* And had not that or som other copy bin produc'd, they had biu much in the dark as to the particulars of their reformation; which that they had not bin convei'd by Tradition, appears by the sudden startling of the King upon the reading of the Law; which could not have bin, had

had he bin before poſſeſt with the contents of it. In like manner we find in *Nehemiah*, that the obſervation of the Feaſt of Tabernacles was recover'd by conſulting the Law; the Tradition whereof was wholly worn out; or elſe it had ſure bin impoſſible that it could for ſo long a time have bin intermitted, *Neh. 8. 18.* And yet mens memories are commonly more retentive of an external viſible rite, then they are of ſpeculative Propoſitions, or moral Precepts.

30. THESE inſtances ſhew how fallible an expedient mere oral Tradition is for tranſmiſſion to poſterity. But admit no ſuch inſtance could be given, 'tis argument enough that God has by his own choice of writing, given the preference to it. Nor has he barely choſen it, but has made it the ſtandard by which to meſure all ſucceeding pretences. 'Tis the means he preſcribes for diſtinguiſhing divine from diabolical Inſpirations: *To the Law and to the Teſtimony: if they ſpeak not according to this Word, there is no light in them,* Iſai. 8. 20. And when the Lawier interrogated our Savior what he ſhould do to inherit eternal life, he ſends him not to ranſac Tradition, or the cabaliſtical divinity of the Rabbins, but refers him to the Law: *What is written in the Law? how readeſt thou?* Luk. 10. 26. And indeed, throout the Goſpel, we ſtill find him in his diſcourſe appealing to

Scripture, and aſſerting its autority: as on the other ſide inveighing againſt thoſe Traditions of the Elders which had evacuated the written Word: *Ye make the Word of God of none effect by your Tradition*, Mat. 15. 6. Which as it abundantly ſhews Chriſts adherence to the written Word, ſo 'tis a pregnant inſtance how poſſible it is for Tradition to be corrupted, and made the inſtrument of impoſing mens phancies even in contradiction to Gods commands.

31. And ſince our bleſſed Lord has made Scripture the teſt whereby to try Traditions, we may ſurely acquieſce in his deciſion, and either embrace or reject Traditions, according as they correſpond to the ſupreme rule, the written Word. It muſt therefore be a very unwarrantable attemt to ſet up Tradition in competition with (much more in contradiction to) that to which Chriſt himſelf hath ſubjected it.

32. Saint *Paul* reckons it as the principal privilege of the Jewiſh Church, that it had the Oracles of God committed to it; *i. e.* that the holy Scriptures were depoſited, and put in its cuſtody: and in this the Chriſtian Church ſucceeds it, and is the guardian and conſervator of holy Writ. I ask then, had the Jewiſh Church by vertue of its being keeper, a power to ſuperſede any part of thoſe Oracles intruſted to them? if ſo, Saint *Paul* was much

much out in his eſtimate, and ought to have reckon'd that as their higheſt privilege. But indeed, the very nature of the truſt implies the contrary; and beſides, 'tis evident, that is the very crime Chriſt charges upon the Jews in the place above cited. And if the Jewiſh Church had no ſuch right, upon what account can the Chriſtian claim any? Has Chriſt enlarg'd its Charter? has he left the ſacred Scriptures with her, not to preſerve and practice, but to regulate and reform? to fill up its vacancies, and ſupply its defects by her own Traditions? if ſo, let the commiſſion be produc'd; but if her office be only that of guardianſhip and truſt, ſhe muſt neither ſubſtract from, nor by any ſuperadditions of her own evacuate its meaning and efficacy: and to do ſo, would be the ſame guilt that it would be in a perſon intruſted with the fundamental Records of a Nation, to foiſt in ſuch clauſes as himſelf pleaſes.

33. IN ſhort, God has in the Scriptures laid down exact rules for our belief and practice, and has entruſted the Church to convey them to us: if ſhe vary, or any way enervate them, ſhe is falſe to that truſt, but cannot by it oblige us to recede from that rule ſhe ſhould deliver, to comply with that ſhe obtrudes upon us. The caſe may be illuſtrated by an eaſy reſemblance. Suppoſe a King have a forreign principality for which he compoſes

a body of Laws; annexes to them rewards and penalties, and requires an exact and indispensable conformity to them. These being put in writing, he sends by a select messenger: now suppose this messenger deliver them, yet saies withall, that himself has autority from the King to supersede these Laws at his plesure; so that their last resort must be to his dictats, yet produces no other testimony but his own bare affirmation. Is it possible that any men in their wits should be so stupidly credulous, as to incur the penalty of those Laws upon so improbable an indemnity? And sure it would be no whit less madness in Christians, to violate any precept of God, on an ungrounded supposal of the Churches power to dispense with them.

34. AND if the Church universal have not this power, nor indeed ever claim'd it, it must be a strange insolence for any particular Church to pretend to it, as the Church of *Rome* do's; as if we should owe to her Tradition all our Scripture, and all our Faith; insomuch that without the supplies which she affords from the Oracle of her Chair, our Religion were imperfect, and our salvation insecure. Upon which wild dictates I shall take liberty in a distinct Section, farther to animadvert.

SECT.

SECT. VI.

The ſuffrage of the primitive Chriſtian Church, concerning the propriety and fitneſs which the Scripture has towards the attainment of its excellent end.

AGAINST what has bin hitherto ſaid to the advantage of the holy Scripture, there oppoſes it ſelf (as we have already intimated) the autority of the Church of *Rome*; which allows it to be only an imperfect rule of Faith, ſaying in the fourth Seſſion of the Council of *Trent*, that *Chriſtian faith and diſcipline, are contain'd in the Books written, and unwritten Tradition.* And in the fourth rule of the Index put forth by command of the ſaid Council, *the Scripture* is declar'd to be *ſo far from uſeful, that its reading is pernicious if permitted promiſcuouſly in the vulgar Tongue*, and therefore to be withheld: inſomuch that the ſtudy of the holy Bible is commonly by perſons of the Roman Communion, imputed to Proteſtants as part of their hereſy; they being call'd by them in contemt the Evangelical men, and Scripturarians. And the Bible in the vulgar Tongue of any Nation, is commonly reckon'd among prohibited Books, and as ſuch, publicly burnt when

when met with by the Inquiſitors: and the perſon who is found with it, or to read therein, is ſubjected to ſevere penalties.

2. FOR the vindication of the truth of God, and to put to ſhame thoſe unhappy Innovators, who amidſt great pretences to antiquity, and veneration to the Scriptures, prevaricat from both: I think it may not be amiſs, to ſhew plainly the mind of the primitive Church herein; and that in as few words as the matter will admit.

3. FIRST I premiſe that *Ireneus* and *Tertullian* having to do with Heretics, who boaſted themſelves to be emendators of the Apoſtles, and wiſer then they; deſpiſing their autority, rejecting ſeveral parts of the Scripture, and obtruding other writings in their ſteed, have had recourſe unto Tradition, with a ſeeming preference of it unto Scripture. Their adverſaries having no common principle beſides the owning the name of Chriſtians; it was impoſſible to convince them, but by a recourſe to ſuch a medium which they would allow. But theſe Fathers being to ſet down and eſtabliſh their Faith, are moſt expreſs in reſolving it into Scripture: and when they recommend Tradition, ever mean ſuch as is alſo Apoſtolical.

4. IRENEUS in the ſecond Book, 47. c. tells us, *that the Scriptures are perfect, as dictated by the word of God and his ſpirit.* And the ſame

ſame Father begins his third Book in this manner, *The diſpoſition of our ſalvation is no otherwiſe known by us, then by thoſe by whom the Goſpel was brought to us; which indeed they firſt preach'd, but afterward deliver'd it to us in the Scripture, to be the foundation and pillar of our Faith. Nor may we imagin, that they began to preach to others, before they themſelves had perfect knowledg, as ſom are bold to ſay; boaſting themſelves to be emendators of the Apoſtles. For after our Lords Reſurrection, they were indued with the power of the holy Spirit from on high; and having perfect knowledg, went forth to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of ſalvation, and celeſtial praiſe unto men. Each and all of whom had the Goſpel of God. So Saint* Matthew *wrote the Goſpel to the Hebrews, in their tongue. Saint* Peter *and Saint* Paul *preach'd at* Rome, *and there founded a Church:* Mark *the Diſciple and interpreter of* Peter, *deliver'd in writing what he had preach'd, and* Luke *the follower of* Paul *ſet down in his Book the Goſpel he had deliver'd. Afterward Saint* John *at* Epheſus *in* Aſia *publiſh'd his Goſpel, &c.* In his fourth Book, c. 66. he directs all the Heretics with whom he deals, to *read diligently the Goſpel deliver'd by the Apoſtles, and alſo read diligently the Prophets*, aſſuring *they ſhall there find every action, every doctrin, and every ſuffering of our Lord declared by them.*

5. THUS

5. THUS *Tertullian* in his Book of Prescriptions, c. 6. *It is not lawful for us to introduce any thing of our own will, nor make any choice upon our arbitrement. We have the Apostles of our Lord for our Authors, who themselves took up nothing on their own will or choice; but faithfully imparted to the Nations the discipline which they had receiv'd from Christ. So that if an Angel from heaven should teach another doctrin, he were to be accurst.* And c. 25. *'Tis madness*, saies he of the Heretics, *when they confess that the Apostles were ignorant of nothing, nor taught things different; to think that they did not revele all things to all:* which he enforces in the following chapter. In his Book against *Hermogenes*, c. 23. he discourses thus; *I adore the plenitude of the Scripture, which discovers to me the Creator, and what was created. Also in the Gospel I find the Word was the Arbiter and Agent in the Creation. That all things were made of preexistent matter I never read. Let* Hermogenes, *and his journy-men shew that it is written. If it be not written, let him fear the woe, which belongs to them that add or detract.* And in the 39. ch. of his Prescript. *We feed our faith, raise our hope, and establish our reliance with the sacred Words.*

6. IN like manner *Hippolytus* in the Homily against *Noetus* declares, that *we acknowledg only from Scripture that there is one God. And whereas secular Philosophy is not to be had,*

but

but from the reading of the doctrin of the Philoſophers; ſo whoſoever of us will preſerve piety towards God, he cannot otherwiſe learn it then from the holy Scripture. Accordingly *Origen* in the fifth Homily on *Leviticus*, ſaies, that *in the Scripture every word appertaining to God, is to be ſought and diſcuſt; and the knowledg of all things is to be receiv'd.*

7. WHAT Saint *Cyprian's* opinion was in this point, we learn at large from his Epiſtle to *Pompey*. For when Tradition was objected to him, he anſwers; *Whence is this Tradition? is it from the autority of our Lord and his Goſpel; or comes it from the commands of the Apoſtles in their Epiſtles? Almighty God declares that what is written ſhould be obei'd and practic'd. The Book of the Law, ſaies he in* Joſhua, *ſhall not depart from thy mouth, but thou ſhalt meditate in it day and night, that you may obſerve and keep all that is written therein. So' our Lord ſending his Apoſtles, commands them to baptize all Nations, and teach them to obſerve all things that he had commanded.* Again, *what obſtinacy and preſumtion is it to prefer human Tradition to divine Command: not conſidering that Gods wrath is kindled as often as his Precepts are diſſolv'd and neglected by reaſon of human Traditions. Thus God warns and ſpeaks by* Iſaiah: *This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worſhip me,*

teaching for doctrins the commandments of men. Also the Lord in the Gospel checks and reproves, saying; you reject the Law of God, that you may establish your Tradition. Of which Precept the Apostle Saint Paul *being mindful, admonishes and instructs, saying; If any man teaches otherwise, and hearkens not to sound doctrin, and the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is proud, knowing nothing: From such we must depart.* And again he adds, *There is a compendious way for religious and sincere minds, both to depositt their errors, and find out the truth. For if we return to the source and original of divine Tradition, human error will cease, and the ground of heavenly Mysteries being seen, whatsoever was hid with clouds and darkness, will be manifest by the light of truth. If a pipe that brought plentiful supplies of water, fail on the suddain, do not men look to the fountain, and thence learn the cause of the defect, whether the spring it self be dry; or if running freely, the water is stopt in its passage; that if by interrupted or broken conveiances, it was hindred to pass, they being repair'd, it may again be brought to the City, with the same plenty as it flows from the spring? And this Gods Priests ought to do at this time, obeying the commands of God, that if truth have swerv'd or fail'd in any particular, we go backward to the source of the Evangelical and Apostolical Tradition, and there found our actings; from whence their order and origation began.*

8. It

8. IT is true *Bellarmine* reproches this diſcourſe as erroneous; but whatever it might be in the inference which Saint *Cyprian* drew from it, in it ſelf it was not ſo. For Saint *Auſtin*, tho ſufficiently engag'd againſt Saint *Cyprian's* concluſion, allows the poſition as moſt Orthodox; ſaying, in the fourth Book of Baptiſm, c. 35. *Whereas he admoniſhes to go back to the fountain, that is, the Tradition of the Apoſtles, and thence bring the ſtream down to our times; 'tis moſt excellent, and without doubt to be don.*

9. THUS *Euſebius* expreſſes himſelf in his ſecond Book againſt *Sabellius*. *As it is a point of ſloth, not to ſeek into thoſe things, whereof one may enquire; ſo 'tis inſolence to be inquiſitive in others. But what are thoſe things which we ought to enquire into? Even thoſe which are to be found in the Scriptures: thoſe things which are not there to be found, let us not ſeek after. For if they ought to be known, the holy Ghoſt had not omitted them in the Scripture.*

10. ATHANASIUS in his Tract of the Incarnation, ſaies, *It is fit for us to adhere to the word of God, and not relinquiſh it, thinking by ſyllogiſms to evade, what is there clearly deliver'd.* Again in his Tract to *Serap.* of the holy Ghoſt: *Ask not, ſaies he, concerning the Trinity, but learn only from the Scriptures. For the inſtructions which you will find there, are ſufficient.* And in his Oration againſt the Gen-

tiles, declares, *That the Scriptures are ſufficient to the manifeſtation of the truth.*

11. AGREEABLE to theſe is *Optatus* in his 5. Book againſt *Parmen.* who reaſons thus, *You ſay 'tis lawful to rebaptize, we ſay 'tis not lawful: betwixt your ſaying and our gain-ſaying the peoples minds are amus'd. Let no man believe either you or us. All men are apt to be contentious. Therefore Judges are to be call'd in. Chriſtians they cannot be; for they will be parties; and thereby partial. Therefore a Judg is to be lookt out from abroad. If a Pagan, he knows not the myſteries of our Religion. If a Jew, he is an enemy to our baptiſm. There is therefore no earthly Judg; but one is to be ſought from heaven. Yet there is no need of a reſort to heaven, when we have in the Goſpel a Teſtament: and in this caſe, celeſtial things may be compar'd to earthly. So it is as with a Father who has many children; while he is preſent he orders them all, and there is no need of a written Will: Accordingly Chriſt when he was preſent upon earth, from time to time commanded the Apoſtles whatſoever was neceſſary. But as the earthly father finding himſelf to be at the point of death, and fearing that after his departure his children ſhould quarrel among themſelves, he calls witneſſes, and puts his mind in writing; and if any difference ariſe among the brethren, they go not to their Fathers Sepulcher, but repair to his Will and Teſtament; and he who reſts in his grave,*

grave, ſpeaks ſtill in his writing, as if he were alive. Our Lord who left his Will among us, is now in heaven, therefore let us ſeek his commands in the Goſpel, as in his Will.

12. THUS *Cyril* of *Ieruſ.* Cat. 4. *Nothing, no not the leaſt concernment of the divine and holy Sacraments of our Faith, is to be deliver'd without the holy Scripture: believe not me unleſs I give you a demonſtration of what I ſay from the Scripture.*

13. SAINT *Baſil* in his Book of the true Faith ſaies, *If God be faithful in all his ſayings, his words, and works, they remaining for ever, and being don in truth and equity; it muſt be an evident ſign of infidelity and pride, if any one ſhall reject what is written, and introduce what is not written.* In which Books he generally declares that he will write nothing but what he receives from the holy Scripture: and that he abhors from taking it elſewhere. In his 29. Homily againſt the Antitrinit. *Believe*, ſaies he, *thoſe which are written; ſeek not thoſe which are not written.* And in his Eth. reg. 26. *Every word and action ought to be confirm'd by the teſtimony of the divinely inſpir'd Scriptures to the eſtabliſhment of the Faith of the good, and reproof of the wicked.*

14. SAINT *Ambroſe* in the firſt Book of his Offic. ſaies: *How can we make uſe of any thing which is not to be found in Scripture?* And in his Inſtit. of Virgins. *I read he is the firſt, but*

read

read not he is the ſecond; let them who ſay he is ſecond, ſhew it from the reading.

15. GREG. *Nyſſen* in his Dial. of the ſoul and reſurrect. ſaies, *'Tis undeniable, that truth is there only to be plac'd, where there is the ſeal of Scripture Teſtimony.*

16. SAINT *Jerom* againſt *Helvidius* declares. *As we deny not that which is written, ſo we refuſe thoſe which are not written.* And in his Comment on the 98. Pſ. *Every thing that we aſſert, we muſt ſhew from the holy Scripture. The word of him that ſpeaks has not that autority as Gods precept.* And on the 87. Pſ. *Whatever is ſaid after the Apoſtles, let it be cut off, nor have afterwards autority. Tho one be holy after the Apoſtles, tho one be eloquent; yet has he not autority.*

17. SAINT *Auſtin* in his Tract of the unity of the Church, c. 12. *acknowledges that he could not be convinc'd but by the Scriptures of what he was to believe; and adds they are read with ſuch manifeſtation, that he who believes them, muſt confeſs the doctrin to be moſt true.* In the ſecond Book of Chriſtian doctrin, c. 9. he ſaies, that *in the plain places of Scripture are found all thoſe things that concern Faith and Manners.* And in Epiſt. 42. *All things which have bin exhibited heretofore as don to mankind, and what we now ſee and deliver to our poſterity, the Scripture has not paſt them in ſilence, ſo far forth as they concern*

the

the ſearch or defence of our Religion. In his Tract of the good of Widowhood, he ſaies to *Julian*, the perſon to whom he addreſſes: *What ſhall I teach you more then that we read in the Apoſtle: for the holy Scripture ſettles the rule of our doctrin; that we think not any thing more then we ought to think; but to think ſoberly, as God has dealt to every man the meſure of Faith. Therefore my teaching is only to expound the words of this Doctor,* Ep. 157. *Where any ſubject is obſcure, and paſſes our comprehenſion, and the Scripture do's not plainly afford its help, there human conjecture is preſumtuous in defining.*

18. THEOPHILUS of *Alex.* in his ſecond Paſchal homily, tells us, that *'tis the ſuggeſtion of a diabolical ſpirit to think that any thing beſides the Scripture has divine autority.* And in his third he adds, that *the Doctors of the Church having the Teſtimony of the Scripture, lay firm foundation of their doctrin.*

19. CHRYSOSTOM in his third Homily on the firſt of the *Theſſal.* aſſerts, that *from the alone reading or hearing of the Scripture one may learn all things neceſſary.* So Hom. 34. on Act. 15. he declares. *A heathen comes and ſaies: I would willingly be a Chriſtian, but I know not who to join my ſelf to; for there are many contentions among you, many ſeditions and tumults; ſo that I am in doubt what opinion I ſhould chuſe, Each man ſaies, what I ſay is true,*

true, and I know not whom to believe; each pretends to Scripture which I am ignorant of. 'Tis very well the issue is put here: for if the appeal were to reason, in this case there would be just occasion of being troubled: but when we appeal to Scripture, and they are simple and certain, you may easily your self judg. He that agrees with the Scripture is a Christian; he that resists them, is far out of the way. And on Ps. 95. *If any thing be said without the Scripture, the mind halts between different opinions; somtimes inclining as to what is probable, anon rejecting as what is frivolous: but when the testimony of holy Scripture is produc'd, the mind both of speaker and hearer is confirm'd.* And Hom. 4. on *Lazar. Tho one should rise from the dead, or an Angel come down from heaven, we must believe the Scripture; they being fram'd by the Lord of Angels, and the quick and dead.* And Hom. 13. 2 Cor. 7. *Is it not an absurd thing that when we deal with men about mony, we will trust no body, but cast up the sum, and make use of our counters; but in religious affairs, suffer our selves to be led aside by other mens opinions, even then when we have by an exact scale and touch-stone, the dictat of the divine Law. Therefore I pray and exhort you, that giving no heed to what this or that man saies, you would consult the holy Scripture, and thence learn the divine riches, and pursue what you have learnt.* And Hom. 58. on Jo. 10. 1. *'Tis the mark of a thief that*

that he comes not in by the dore, but another way: now by the dore the teſtimony of the Scripture is ſignified. And Hom. on Gal. 1. 8. *The Apoſtle ſaies not, if any man teach a contrary doctrin let him be accurs'd, or if he ſubvert the whole Goſpel; but if he teach any thing beſide the Goſpel which you have receiv'd, or vary any little thing, let him be accurs'd.*

20. CYRIL of *Alex.* againſt *Jul. l.* 7. ſaies, *The holy Scripture is ſufficient to make them who are inſtructed in it, wiſe unto ſalvation, and endued with moſt ample knowledg.*

21. THEODORET Dial. 1. *I am perſwaded only by the holy Scripture.* And Dial. 2. *I am not ſo bold to affirm any thing, not ſpoken of in the Scripture.* And again, qu. 45. upon *Geneſ. We ought not to enquire after what is paſt over in ſilence, but acquieſce in what is written.*

22. IT were eaſy to enlarge this diſcourſe into a Volume; but having taken, as they offer'd themſelves, the ſuffrages of the writers of the four firſt Centuries, I ſhall not proceed to thoſe that follow. If the holy Scripture were a perfect rule of Faith and Manners to all Chriſtians heretofore, we may reaſonably aſſure our ſelves it is ſo ſtill; and will now guide us into all neceſſary truth, and conſequently make us wiſe unto ſalvation, without the aid of oral Tradition, or the new mintage of a living infallible Judg of controverſy. And the

impartial Reader will be enabled to judg whether our appeal to the holy Scripture, in all occaſions of controverſy, and recommendation of it to the ſtudy of every Chriſtian, be that hereſy and innovation which it is ſaid to be.

23. IT is, we know, ſeverely imputed to the Scribes and Phariſees by our Savior, that they took from the people *the key of knowledg*, Luk. 11. 52. and had *made the word of God of none effect by their Traditions*, Mat. 15. 6. but they never attemted what has bin ſince practiced by their Succeſſors in the Weſtern Church, to take away the Ark of the Teſtament it ſelf, and cut off not only the efficacy, but very poſſeſſion of the word of God by their Traditions. Surely this had bin exceeding criminal from any hand: but that the Biſhops and Governors of the Church, and the univerſal and infallible Paſtor of it, who claim the office to interpret the Scriptures, exhort unto, and aſſiſt in the knowledg of them, ſhould be the men who thus rob the people of them; carries with it the higheſt aggravations both of cruelty and breach of truſt. *If any man ſhall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy*, ſaies Saint *John*, Revel. 22. 19. *God ſhall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy City, and from the things which*

which are written in this Book. What vengeance therefore awaits thoſe, who have taken away not only from one Book, but at once the Books themſelves, even all the Scriptures, the whole word of God?

SECT. VII.

Hiſtorical reflexions upon the events which have happen'd in the Church ſince the with-drawing of the holy Scripture.

TWILL in this place be no uſeleſs contemplation to obſerve, after the Scriptures had bin raviſht from the people in the Church of *Rome*, what pitiful pretenders were admitted to ſucceed. And firſt becauſe Lay-men were preſum'd to be illiterate, and eaſily ſeducible by thoſe writings which were in themſelves difficult, and would be wreſted by the *unlearned to their own deſtruction*; pictures were recommended in their ſteed, and complemented as the Books of the Laity, which ſoon emprov'd into a neceſſity of their worſhip, and that groſs ſuperſtition which renders Chriſtianity abominated by Turks, and Jews, and Heathens unto this day.

2. I would not be haſty in charging Idolatry upon the Church of *Rome*, or all in her communion; but that their Image-worſhip is a moſt fatal ſnare, in which vaſt numbers of unhappy ſouls are taken, no man can doubt who hath with any regard travail'd in Popiſh Countries. I my ſelf, and thouſands of others, whom

whom the late troubles, or other occaſions ſent abroad, are and have bin witneſſes thereof. Charity, 'tis true, believes all things, but it do's not oblige men to disbelieve their eies. 'Twas the out-cry of *Micah* againſt the Danites, *Jud. 18. 24. ye have taken away my Gods which I have made, and the Prieſt, and are gon away, and what have I more?* but the Laity of the Roman communion may enlarge the complaint, and ſay; you have taken away the oracles of our God, and ſet up every where among us graven and molten Images, and Teraphims, and what have we more? and 'twas lately the loud, and I doubt me is ſtill, the unanſwerable complaint of the poor Americans, that they were deni'd to worſhip their Pagod once in the year, when they who forbad them, worſhip'd theirs every day.

3. THE Jews before the captivity, notwithſtanding the recent memory of the Miracles in Egypt and the Wilderneſs, and the firſt conqueſt of the Land of *Canaan* with thoſe that ſucceeded under the Judges and kings of *Iſrael* and *Juda*; as alſo the expreſs command of God, and the menaces of Prophets, ever and anon fell to downright Idolatry: but after their return unto this day, have kept themſelves from falling into that ſin, tho they had no Prophets to inſtruct them, no miracles or government to encourage or conſtrain them. The reaſon of which a very learned

learned man in his diſcourſe of religious Aſſemblies takes to be, the reading and teaching of the Law in their Synagogues; which was perform'd with great exactneſs after the return from the captivity, but was not ſo perform'd before. And may we not invert the obſervation, and impute the Image-worſhip now ſet up in the Chriſtian Church, to the forbidding the reading of the Scriptures in the Churches, and interdicting the privat uſe, and inſtitution in them?

4. FOR a farther ſupplement in place of the Scriptures, whoſe Hiſtory was thought not edifying enough, the Legends of the Saints were introduc'd; ſtories ſo ſtupid, that one would imagin them deſign'd as an experiment how far credulity could be impos'd upon; or elſe fram'd to a worſe intent, that Chriſtianity by them might be made ridiculous. Yet theſe are recommended to uſe and veneration, while in the mean time the word of God is utterly forbidden, whereby the parties to this unhappy practice (that I may ſpeak in the words of the Prophet *Jorem. 2.13.*) *have committed two evils, they have forſaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out ciſterns, broken ciſterns that can hold no water.*

5. FARTHER yet, the ſame unreaſonable tyranny which permitted not the Laity to underſtand Almighty God ſpeaking to them in the

the Scripture; hinder'd them from being ſuffer'd to underſtand the Church or themſelves ſpeaking to him in their praiers; whilſt the whole Roman office is ſo diſpos'd, that in defiance of the Apoſtles diſcourſe, *1 Cor. 14. he that occupies the room of the unlearned muſt ſay amen, to thoſe praiers and praiſes which he has no comprehenſion of:* and by his endleſs repetitions of Paters, Ave's and Credo's, falls into that battology reprov'd by our Savior, *Mat, 6. 7.* and as 'twas ſaid to the woman of *Samaria*, Jo. 4. 22. *knows not what he worſhips.* Yet this unaccountable practice is ſo much the darling of that Church, that when in *France* about eighteen years ſince, the Roman Miſſal was tranſlated into the vulgar Tongue, and publiſh'd by the direction of ſeveral of their Biſhops; the Clergy of *France* roſe up in great fury againſt the attemt, anathematizing in their circular Epiſtles, *all that ſold, read, or us'd the ſaid Book:* and upon complaint unto Pope *Alex.* the 7. he reſented the matter ſo deeply, as to iſſue out his Bull againſt it in the following words.

6. WHEREAS *ſons of perdition, endevoring the deſtruction of ſouls, have tranſlated the Roman Miſſal into the French Tongue, and ſo attemted to throw down and trample upon the majeſty of the holy Rites comprehended in Latin words: As we abominate and deteſt the novelty, which will deform the beauty of the Church, and produce diſobe-*

disobedience, temerity, boldness, sedition and schism; so we condemn, reprobate and forbid, the said and all other such Translations, and interdict the reading, and keeping, to all and singular the faithful, of whatever sex, degree, order, condition, dignity, honor, or preeminence, &c. *under pain of excommunication. And we command the copies to be immediatly burnt,* &c. So mortal a sin it seems 'twas thought for the Laity to understand the praiers in which they must communicate.

7. NOR is this all; agreeable to the other attemts upon the holy Scripture, was the bold insolence of making a new authentic Text, in that unknown Tongue in which the offices of praier had bin, and were to be kept disguis'd; which was don by the decree of the Council of *Trent* in the fourth Session. But when the Council had given this Prerogative to the Version which it call'd vulgar, the succeeding Popes began to consider what that Version was; and this work *Pius* the fourth and fifth set upon, but prevented by death fail'd to complete it, so that the honor of the performance fell to *Sixtus* the fifth, who in the plenitude of his Apostolic power (the Translation being reform'd to his mind) commanded it to be that genuine ancient Edition, which the *Trent* Fathers had before made authentic, and under the pain of excommunication requir'd it to be so received: which he do's in this form

form. *Of our certain knowledg, and the plenitude of Apoſtolic power, we order and declare that vulgar Edition which has bin receiv'd for authentic by the Council of* Trent, *is without doubt or controverſy to be eſteem'd this very one, which being amended as well as it is poſſible, and printed at the Vatican Preſs, we publiſh to be read in the whole Chriſtian Republic, and in all Churches of the Chriſtian world. Decreeing that it having bin approv'd by the conſent of the holy univerſal Church, and the holy Fathers, and then by the Decree of the general Council of* Trent, *and now by the Apoſtolic autority deliver'd to us by the Lord; is the true, legitimate, authentic, and undoubted, which is to be received and held in all public and privat Diſputations, Lectures, Preachings, and Expoſitions,* &c. But notwithſtanding this certain knowledg, and plenitude of Apoſtolic power, ſoon after came *Clement* the eighth, and again reſumes the work of his Predeceſſor *Sixtus*, diſcovers great and many errors in it, and puts out one more reform'd, yet confeſt by himſelf to be imperfect; which now ſtands for the authentic Text, and carries the title of the Bible put forth by *Sixtus*, notwithſtanding all its alterations. So well do's the Roman Church deſerve the honor which ſhe pretends to, of being the *miſtreſs of all Churches*; and ſo infallible is the holy Chair in its determinations: and laſtly, ſo authentic a Tranſcript of the word of God (con-

cerning which 'tis said; *Mat. 5. 18. one jot or one title shall not fail)* is that which she establisht, and that has receiv'd so many, and yet according to the confession of the infallible Corrector, wants still more alterations.

8. DEPENDENT upon this, and as great a mischief as any of the former, consequent to the with-drawing of the Scripture, I take to be the step it made to the overthrow of the ancient and most useful disciplin of the Church in point of Penance, whose rigors alwaies heretofore preceded the possibility of having absolution. Now of this we know a solemn part was the state of Audience, when the lapst person was receiv'd after long attendance without dores, prostrations, and lamentations there, within the entrance of the Church; and was permitted with the Catechumens or Candidats of Baptism, to hear the readings of the Scripture, and stay till Praier began, but then depart. He was oblig'd to hear the terrors of the Lord, the threats of the divine Law against sin and sinners, to stand among the unbaptiz'd and heathen multitude, and learn again the elements of that holy Faith from which he had prevaricated; and so in time be render'd capable of the devotions of the faithful, and afterward the reception of the Eucharist. But when the Scriptures were thought useless or dangerous to be understood and heard, it was

was conſequent that the ſtate of Audience ſhould be cut off from Penance, and that the next to it, upon the ſelf-ſame principle ſhould be diſmiſt: and ſo the long probation formerly requir'd ſhould be ſupplanted; and the compendious way of pardoning firſt, and repenting afterwards, the endleſs circle of ſinning and being abſolv'd, and then ſinning and being abſolv'd again, ſhould prevail upon the Church. Which ſtill obtains, notwithſtanding the complaints, and irrefragable demonſtrations of learned men even of the Romiſh Communion, who plainly ſhew this now receiv'd method, to be an innovation groundleſs and unreaſonable, and moſt pernicious in its conſequents.

9. AND, by the way, we may take notice that there cannot be a plainer evidence of the judgment of the Church, concerning the neceſſity of the Scriptures being known, not only by the learned but mean Chriſtian, and the intereſt they have therein; then is the ancient courſe of Penance, eſtabliſht by the practice of all the firſt Ages, and almoſt as many Councils, whether general or local, as have decreed any thing concerning diſciplin; with the penitentiary Books and Canons, which were written for the firſt eleven hundred years in the whole Chriſtian world. For if even the unbaptiz'd Catechumen, and the lapſt ſinner, notwithſtanding their ſlen-

der knowledg in the myſteries of Faith, or frail pretence to the privilege thereof, had a right to the ſtate of Audience, and was oblig'd to hear the Scripture read; ſurely the meaneſt unobnoxious Laic, was in as advantagious circumſtances, and might not only be truſted with the reading of thoſe ſacred Books, but might claim them as his birth-right.

10. I may juſtly, over and above what has bin hitherto alleg'd, impute to the Governors of the ſame Church, and their with-holding from the Laity the holy Scripture; the many dangerous errors, groſs ignorances, and ſcandalous immoralities which have prevail'd among them both. It is no new method of divine vengeance, that there ſhould *be like people, like Prieſt*, Hoſ. 4. 9. *and that the Idol ſhepherd who led his flock into the ditch, ſhould fall therein himſelf*, Mat. 15. 14. And as the Prophet *Zachary* deſcribes it, c. 11. 17. *The ſword ſhall be upon his arm, and upon his right eie: his arm ſhall be clean dried up, and his right eie ſhall be utterly darkned.*

11. But no conſequence can be more obviouſly deducible from that practice, then that men ſhould juſtify the with-holding of the Scripture, by leſſening its credit, and depreciating its worth: which has occaſion'd thoſe reproches which by the writers of the Church of *Rome*, of beſt note, have bin caſt upon

upon it. As that it was *a Noſe of wax, a leaden rule, a deaf and uſeleſs deputy to God in the office of a Judg; of leſs autority then the Roman Church, and of no more credit then* Eſops *Fables, but for the teſtimony of the ſaid Church; that they contain things apt to raiſe laughter or indignation, that the Latin Tranſlation in the ComplutenſianBible is placed between the Hebrew Text, and the Septuagint Verſion, as our Savior was at his Crucifixion between two thieves; and that the vulgar Edition is of ſuch autority that the Originals ought to be mended by it, rather then it ſhould be mended from them:* which are the complements of Cardinal *Bellarmin, Hoſius, Eckius, Perron, Ximenes, Coqueus,* and others of that Communion: words to be anſwer'd by a Thunderbolt, and fitter for the mouth of a *Celſus* or a *Porphyrie*, then of the pious ſons, and zealous Champions of the Church of Chriſt.

12. TIS to be expected that the Romaniſts ſhould now wipe their mouths, and plead not guilty; telling us that they permit the Scripture to the Laity in their mother Tongue: And to that purpoſe the Fathers of *Rhemes* and *Doway* have publiſht an Engliſh Bible for thoſe of their communion. I ſhall therefore give a ſhort and plain account of the whole affair, as really it ſtands, and then on Gods name let the Romaniſts make the beſt of their Apology.

13. TI

13. THE fourth rule of the Index of prohibited Books compos'd upon the command and auſpice of the Council of *Trent*, and publiſh'd by the autority of *Pius* the fourth, *Sixtus* the fifth, and *Clement* the eighth, runs thus; *Since 'tis manifeſt by experience, that if the holy Bible be ſuffer'd promiſcuouſly in the vulgar Tongue, ſuch is the temerity of men, that greater detriment then advantage will thence ariſe; in this matter let the judgment of the Biſhop or Inquiſitor be ſtood to: that with the advice of the Curat or Confeſſor, they may give leave for the reading of the Bible in the vulgar Tongue, tranſlated by Catholics, to ſuch as they know will not receive damage, but increaſe of Faith and Piety thereby. Which faculty they ſhall have in writing; and whoſoever without ſuch faculty ſhall preſume to have or to read the Bible, he ſhall not till he have deliver'd it up, receive abſolution of his ſins.* Now (to paſs over the iniquity of obliging men to ask leave to do that which God Almighty commands) when 'tis conſider'd how few of the Laity can make means to the Biſhop or Inquiſitor, or convince them, or the Curat or Confeſſor, that they are ſuch who will not receive damage, but encreaſe of Faith and Piety by the reading of the Scripture; and alſo have intereſt to prevail with them for their favor herein: and after all can and will be at the charge of taking out the faculty, which is ſo penally requir'd: 'tis eaſy

eaſy to gueſs what thin numbers of the Laity are likely, or indeed capable of reaping benefit by this Indulgence pretended to be allowed them.

14. BUT, beſides all this, what ſhall we ſay, if the power it ſelf of giving Licences be a meſe ſhew, and really ſignifies juſt nothing? In the obſervation ſubjoin'd to this fourth rule it is declar'd, that *the Impreſſion and Edition thereof gives no new faculty to Biſhops, or Inquiſitors, or Superiors of regulars to grant Licences of buying, reading, or retaining Bibles publiſht in a vulgar Tongue; ſince hitherto by the command and practice of the holy Roman and univerſal Inquiſition, the power of giving ſuch faculties, to read or retain vulgar Bibles, or any parts of Scripture of the Old or New Teſtament, in any vulgar Tongue; or alſo ſummaries, or hiſtorical compendiums of the ſaid Bibles or Books of Scripture, in whatſoever Tongue they are written, has bin taken away.* And ſure if a Lay-man cannot read the Bible without a faculty, and it is not in any ones power to grant it; 'twill evidently follow that he cannot read it: And ſo the pretence of giving liberty, owns the ſhame of openly refuſing it, but has no other effect or conſequence. And if any Romaniſt among us, or in any other Proteſtant Country enjoies any liberty herein, 'tis merely by connivance, and owed to a fear leaſt the Votary would be loſt, and take

the

the Bible where it was without difficulty to be had, if ſtrictneſs ſhould be us'd. And ſhould Popery, which God forbid, become paramount; the Tranſlations of the Scripture into our Mother Tongues, would be no more endur'd here, then they are in *Spain*: and they who have formerly bin wary in communicating the Scriptures; remembring how thereby their errors have bin detected, would upon a revolution effectually provide for the future, and be ſure to keep their people in an Egyptian darkneſs, that might it ſelf be felt, but that allow'd the notices of no other object. They would not be content with that compoſition of the Ammonite, to *thruſt out all the right eies* of thoſe that ſubmitted to them, *1 Sam. 11. 2.* but would put out both; as the Philiſtins did to *Samſon*, that they might make their miſerable captives for ever *grind in their Mill*, Jud. 16. 21.

15. BUT this heavieſt of judgments will never fall upon the reform'd Churches, till by their vicious practice and contemt of the divine Law, they have deſerted their profeſſion; and made themſelves utterly unworthy of the bleſſings they enjoy, and the light of that Goſpel which with noon-day brightneſs has ſhin'd among them. Upon which account, I ſuppoſe it may not be impertinent in the next place to ſubjoin ſom plain directions, and cautionary advices, concerning the uſe of theſe ſacred Books. SECT.

SECT. VIII.

Neceſſary cautions to be us'd in the reading of the holy Scriptures.

IT is a common obſervation, that the moſt generous and ſprightly Medicins are the moſt unſafe, if not appli'd with due care and regimen: And the remark holds as well in ſpiritual as corporal remedies. The Apoſtle aſſerts it upon his own experience, that the doctrin of the Goſpel, which was to ſom *the ſavor of life unto life, was to others the ſavor of death*, 2 Cor. 2. 15. And the ſame effect that the oral Word had then, the written Word may have now; not that either the one or the other have any thing in them that is of it ſelf mortiferous, but becomes ſo by the ill diſpoſition of the perſons who ſo pervert it. It is therefore well worth our inquiry, what qualifications on our part are neceſſary to make the Word be to us what it is in it ſelf, *the power of God unto ſalvation*, Rom. 1. 16. Of theſe ſom are previous before our reading, ſom are concomitant with it, and ſom are ſubſequent and follow after it.

2. OF thoſe that go before, ſincerity is a moſt eſſential requiſit: by ſincerity, I mean

an upright intention, by which we direct our reading to that proper end for which the holy Scriptures were deſign'd; *viz.* the knowing Gods will in order to the practicing it. This honeſt ſimplicity of heart is that which Chriſt repreſents by the *good ground*, where alone it was that the ſeed could fructify, *Mat. 13. 8.* And he that brings not this with him, brings only the ſhadow of a Diſciple. The *word of God*, is indeed, *ſharper then a two-edged ſword*, Heb. 4. 12. but what impreſſion can a ſword make on a body of air; which ſtill ſlips from, and eludes its thruſts? And as little can all the practical diſcourſes of holy Writ make on him, who brings only his ſpeculative faculties with him, and leaves his will and affections behind him; which are the only proper ſubjects for it to work on.

3. To this we may probably impute that ſtrange inefficacioufneſs we ſee of the Word. Alas, men rarely apply it to the right place: our moſt inveterat diſeaſes lie in our morals; and we ſuffer the Medicin to reach no farther then our intellects. As if he that had an ulcer in his bowels ſhould apply all his balſoms and ſanatives only to his head. 'Tis true, the holy Scriptures are the treſuries of divine Wiſdom; the Oracles to which we ſhould reſort for ſaving knowledg: but they are alſo the rule and guide of holy Life: and he that covets to know Gods will for any purpoſe but to practice

ctice it, is only ſtudious to entitle himſelf to the greater number of *ſtripes*, Luk. 12. 47.

4. NAY farther, he that affects only the bare knowledg, is oft diſappointed even of that. The Scripture, like the Pillar of fire and cloud, enlightens the Iſraelites, thoſe who ſincerely reſign themſelves to its guidance; but it darkens and confounds the Egyptians, *Ex.* 14. 20. And 'tis frequently ſeen, that thoſe who read only to become knowing, are toll'd on by their curioſity into the more abſtruſe and myſterious parts of Scripture, where they entangle themſelves in inextricable mazes and confuſions; and inſtead of acquiring a more ſuperlative knowledg, looſe thoſe eaſy and common notions which lie obvious to every plain well meaning Reader. I fear this Age affords too many, and too frequent inſtances of this; in men who have loſt God in the midſt of his Word, and ſtudied Scripture till they have renounc'd its Author.

5. AND ſure this infatuation is very juſt, and no more then God himſelf has warn'd us of, who *takes the wiſe in their own craftineſs*, *Job.* 5. 12. but appropriates his *ſecrets only to them that fear him*, and has promis'd *to teach the meek his way*, Pſal. 25. 9. 14. And this was the method Chriſt obſerv'd in his preaching; unveiling thoſe truths to his Diſciples, which to the Scribes and Phariſees, his inquiſitive, yet refractory hearers, he wrapt up in parables:

not that he diſlik'd their deſire of knowledg, but their want of ſincerity: which is ſo fatal a defect as blaſts our purſuits, tho of things in themſelves never ſo excellent. This we find exemplifi'd in *Simon Magus*, Acts 8. who tho he coveted a thing in it ſelf very deſirable, the power of conferring the holy Ghoſt, yet deſiring it not only upon undue conditions, but for ſiniſter ends, he not only miſt of that, but was (after all his convincement by the Apoſtles miracles, and the engagement of his Baptiſm) immerſt *in the gall of bitterneſs*; and at laſt advanc'd to that height of blaſphemy, as to ſet up himſelf for a God; ſo becoming a laſting *memento*, how unſafe it is to prevaricate in holy things.

6. BUT as there is a ſincerity of the Will in order to practice, ſo there is alſo a ſincerity of the underſtanding in order to belief; and this is alſo no leſs requiſit to the profitable reading of Scripture. I mean by this, that we come with a preparation of mind, to embrace indifferently, whatever God there reveles as the object of our Faith: that we bring our own opinions, not as the clue by which to unfold Scripture, but to be tried and regulated by it. The want of this has bin of very pernicious conſequence in matters both of Faith and ſpeculation. Men are commonly prepoſſeſt ſtrongly with their own notions, and their errand to Scripture is not to lend them light

light to judg of them, but aids to back and defend them.

7. OF this there is no Book of controverſy that do's not give notorious proof. The Socinian can eaſily over-look the beginning of Saint *John*, that ſaies, *The Word was God*, Jo. 1.1. and all thoſe other places which plainly aſſert the Deity of our Savior; if he can but divert to that other more agreeable Text, that *the Father is greater then I.* Among the Romaniſts, *Peters* being ſaid to be *firſt among the Apoſtles*, Mat. 10. 2, and that *on that Rock Chriſt would build his Church*, Mat. 16. 18. carries away all attention from thoſe other places where Saint *Paul* ſaies he was not *behind the very chiefeſt of the Apoſtles*, 2 Cor. 11.5. that upon him lay *the care of all the Churches*, 2 Cor. 11. 28. and that the Church was not built upon the *foundation of ſom one, but all the twelve Apoſtles*, Revel. 21. 14. So it fares in the buſineſs of the Euchariſt: *This is my body*, Mat. 26. 26. carries it away clear for Tranſubſtantiation, when our Saviors calling that which he drunk *the fruit of the vine*, Mat. 26. 29. and then Saint *Pauls* naming the Elements in the Lords Supper ſeveral times over Bread and Wine; *The Bread that we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Chriſt: the Cup that we bleſs, is it not the Communion, &c.* 1 Cor. 10. 16. And again, *He that eats this Bread, and drinks this Cup unworthily, &c.* 1 Cor. 11. 29.

29. can make no appearance of an Argument.

8. THUS men once engag'd ranſac for Texts that carry ſom correſpondency to the opinions they have imbibed; and thoſe how do they rack and ſcrue to bring to a perfect conformity; and improve every little probability into a demonſtration? On the other ſide, the contrary Texts they look on as enemies, and conſider them no farther then to provide fences and guards againſt them: So they bring Texts not into the ſcales to weigh, but into the field to skirmiſh, as Partizans and Auxiliaries of ſuch or ſuch opinions.

9. BY this force of prepoſſeſſion it is, that that ſacred Rule, which is the meſure and ſtandard of all rectitude, is it ſelf bow'd and diſtorted to countenance and abet the moſt contrary tenets: and like a variable picture, repreſents differing ſhapes according to the light in which you view it. And ſure we cannot do it a worſe office then to repreſent it thus diſſonant to it ſelf. Yet thus it muſt ſtill be till men come unbiaſt to the reading of it. And certainly there is all the reaſon in the world they ſhould do ſo: the ultimate *end of our faith is but the ſalvation of our ſouls*, 1 Pet. 1.9. and we may be ſure the Scripture can beſt direct us what Faith it is which will lead us to that end.

10. WHY

10. WHY ſhould we not then have the ſame indifference which a traveller hath, whether his way lie on this hand or that; ſo as it be the direct road to his journies end? For altho it be infinitly material that I embrace right principles, yet 'tis not ſo that this ſhould be right rather then the other: and our wiſhes that it ſhould be ſo, proceed only from our prepoſſeſſions and fondneſs of our own conceptions, then which nothing is more apt to intercept the clear view of truth. It therefore nearly concerns us to depoſit them, and to give up our ſelves without reſerve to the guidance of Gods Word, and give it equal credit when it thwarts, as when it complies with our own notions.

11. WITHOUT this, tho we may call Scripture the rule of Faith, and judg of controverſies; yet 'tis manifeſt we make it not ſo, but reſerve ſtill the laſt appeal to our own prejudicat phancies: and then no wonder, tho we fall under the ſame occæcation which our Savior upbraids to the Jews, *that ſeeing, we ſee not, neither do we underſtand*, Mat. 13. 14. For he that will not be ſav'd Gods way, will hardly be ſo by his own. He that reſolves not impartially to embrace all the Scriptures dictats, comes to them as unſincerely, as the remnant of the Jews did to *Jeremiah* to inquire of the Lord for them, which he no ſooner had don, but they proteſt againſt his meſ-

ſage, *Jer.* 42. 20. and may expect as fatal an event.

12. BUT there are a ſet of men who deal yet more inſincerely with the Word; that read it inſiduouſly, on purpoſe to collect matter of objection and cavil: that with a malicious diligence compare Texts in hope to find contradictions; and read attentively, but to no other end then to remark incoherences and defects in the ſtile: which when they think they have ſtarted, they have their deſign; and never will uſe a quarter of the ſame diligence in conſidering how they may be ſolv'd, or conſulting with thoſe who may aſſiſt them in it. For I think I may appeal to the generality of thoſe who have rais'd the loudeſt clamors againſt the Scripture, whether they have endeavor'd to render themſelves competent judges of it by inquiring into the Originals, or informing themſelves of thoſe local Cuſtoms, peculiar Idioms, and many other circumſtances, by which obſcure Texts are to be clear'd. And tho I do not affirm it neceſſary to ſalvation that every man ſhould do this; yet I may affirm it neceſſary to him that will pretend to judg of the Bible: and he that without this condems it, do's it as manifeſt injury, as a Judg that ſhould paſs ſentence only upon the Indictment, without hearing the defence.

13. AND certainly there cannot be any thing

thing more unmanly and diſingenuous, then for men to inveigh and condemn before they inquire and examin. Yet this is the thing upon which ſo many value themſelves, aſſuming to be men of reaſon, for that for which the Scripture pronounces them brute beaſts, viz. *the ſpeaking evil of thoſe things they underſtand not*, 2 Pet. 2. 12. Would men uſe due diligence, no doubt many of thoſe ſeeming contradictions would be reconcil'd, and the obſcurities clear'd: and if any ſhould after all remain, he might find twenty things fitter to charge it on, then want of verity or diſcourſe in the inſpir'd writers.

14. ALAS what human writing is there of near that Antiquity, wherein there are not many paſſages unintelligible? And indeed, unleſs modern times knew all thoſe national cuſtoms, obſolete Laws, particular Rites and Ceremonies, Phraſes and proverbial Sayings, to which ſuch ancient Books refer, 'tis impoſſible but ſom paſſages muſt ſtill remain obſcure. Yet in theſe we ordinarily have ſo much candor, as to impute their unintelligibleneſs to our own ignorance of thoſe things which ſhould clear them, the improprieties of ſtile, to the variation that times make in dialects, or to the errors of Scribes, and do not preſently exclame againſt the Authors as falſe or impertinent, or diſcard the whole Book for ſom ſuch paſſages.

15. And ſure what allowances we make to other Books, may with more reaſon be made to the Bible; which having bin writ ſo many Ages ſince, paſt thro infinit variety of hands, and (which is above all) having bin the object of the Devils, and wicked mens malice, lies under greater diſadvantages then any human compoſure: And doubtleſs men would be as equitable to that as they are to others, were it not that they more wiſh to have that falſe or irrational then any other Book. The plain parts of it, the precepts and threatnings ſpeak clearer then they deſire, gall and fret them; and therefore they will revenge themſelves upon the obſcurer: and ſeem angry that there are ſom things they underſtand not, when indeed their real diſpleſure is at thoſe they do.

16. A ſecond qualification preparatory to reading the Scripture is reverence. When we take the Bible in our hands, we ſhould do it with other ſentiments and apprehenſions then when we take a common Book; conſidering that it is the word of God, the inſtrument of our ſalvation; or upon our abuſe of it, a promoter of our ruin.

17. And ſure this if duly apprehended, cannot but ſtrike us with a reverential awe, make us to ſay with *Jacob*, Gen. 28. 17. *ſurely God is in this place;* controle all trifling phancies, and make us read, not for cuſtom or di-

vertiſe-

vertiſement, but with thoſe ſolemn and holy intentions which become the dignity of its Author. Accordingly we find holy men have in all Ages bin affected with it; and ſom to the inward reverence of the mind, have join'd the outward of the body alſo, and never read it but upon their knees: an example that may both inſtruct and reproach our profaneſs; who commonly read by chance, and at a venture: If a Bible happen in our way, we take it up as we would do a Romance, or Play-book; only herein we differ, that we diſmiſs it much ſooner, and retain leſs of its impreſſions.

18. IT was a Law of *Numa*, that no man ſhould meddle with divine things, or worſhip the Gods, in paſſing, or by accident, but make it a ſet and ſolemn buſineſs. And every one knows with how great ceremony and ſolemnity the heathen Oracles were conſulted. How great a ſhame is it then for Chriſtians to defalk that reverence from the true God, which heathens allow'd their falſe ones?

19. NOW this proceeds ſomtimes from the want of that habitual reverence we ſhould alwaies have to it as Gods word, and ſomtimes from want of actual exciting it, when we go to read: for if the habit lie only dormant in us, and be not awak'd by actual conſideration, it avails us as little in our reading, as the habitual ſtrength of a man do's towards la-

bor, when he will not exert it for that end.

20. WE ought therefore, as to make it our deliberat choice to read Gods word; ſo when we do it, to ſtir up our ſelves to thoſe ſolemn apprehenſions of its dignity and autority, as may render us malleable, and apt to receive its impreſſions: for where there is no reverence, 'tis not to be expected there ſhould be any genuine or laſting obedience.

21. SAINT *Auſtin* in his Tract to *Honoratus*, of the advantage of believing, makes the firſt requiſit to the knowledg of the Scriptures to be the love of them. *Believe me*, ſaies he, *every thing in the Scripture is ſublime and divine, its truth and doctrin are moſt accommodate to the refreſhment, and building up of our minds: and in all reſpects ſo order'd, that every one may draw thence what is ſufficient for him; provided he approach it with devotion, piety, and religion. The proof of this may require much reaſoning and diſcourſe. But this I am firſt to perſwade, that you do not hate the Authors, and then that you love them. Had we an ill opinion of* Virgil, *nay, if upon the account of the reputation he has gain'd with our Predeceſſors, we did not greatly love, before we underſtood him; we ſhould never patiently go thro all the difficult queſtions Grammarians raiſe about him. Many employ themſelves in commenting upon him; we eſteem him moſt, whoſe expoſition moſt commends the Book, and ſhews that the*

the Author, not only was free from error, but did excellently well where he is not underſtood. And if ſuch an account happen not to be given, we impute it rather to the Interpreter then the Poet.

22. THUS the good Father; whoſe words I have tranſcrib'd at large, as being remarkable to the preſent purpoſe; he alſo ſhews that the mind of no Author is to be learnt from one averſe to his doctrin: as that 'tis vain to enquire of *Ariſtotles* Books from one of a different Sect: Or of *Archimedes* from *Epicurus*: the diſcourſe will be as diſpleaſing as the ſpeaker; and that ſhall be eſteem'd abſurd, which comes from one that is envi'd or deſpis'd.

23. A third preparative to our reading ſhould be praier. The Scripture as it was dictated at firſt by the holy Spirit, ſo muſt ſtill owe its effects and influence to its cooperation. *The things of God*, the Apoſtle tells us, *are ſpiritually diſcern'd*, 1 Cor. 2. 14. And tho the natural man may well enough apprehend the letter, and grammatical ſenſe of the Word; yet its power and energy, that inſinuative perſwaſive force whereby it works on hearts, is peculiar to the ſpirit; and therefore without his aids, the Scripture whilſt it lies open before our eies, may ſtill be *as a Book that is ſeal'd*, Eſai. 29. 11. be as ineffective as if the characters were illegible.

24. BE-

24. BESIDES our Savior tells us the devil is ſtill buſy *to ſteal away the ſeed as ſoon as it is ſown*, Mat. 13. 17. And unleſs we have ſom better guard then our own vigilance, he is ſure enough to proſper in his attemt. Let it therefore be our care to invoke the divine Aid; and when ever we take the Bible into our hands, to dart up at leaſt a hearty ejaculation, that we may find its effects in our hearts. Let us ſay with holy *David, open thou mine eies O Lord, that I may ſee the wondrous things of thy Law. Bleſſed art thou O Lord, O teach me thy ſtatutes*, Pſ. 119. Nay indeed 'twil be fit matter of a daily ſolemn devotion, as our Church has made it an annual in the Collect on the ſecond Sunday in Advent: a praier ſo apt and fully expreſſive of what we ſhould deſire in this particular, that if we tranſcribe not only the example, but the very words, I know not how we can form that part of our devotion more advantageouſly.

25. IN the ſecond place we are to conſider what is requir'd of us at the time of reading the Scripture; which conſiſts principally in two things. The firſt of theſe is attention, which is ſo indiſpenſably requiſit, that without it all Books are alike, and all equally inſignificant: for he that adverts not to the ſenſe of what he reads, the wiſeſt diſcourſes ſignify no more to him, then the moſt exquiſit muſic do's to a man perfectly deaf. The letters and ſyl-

lables

lables of the Bible are no more ſacred then thoſe of another Book; 'tis the ſenſe and meaning only that is divinely inſpir'd: and he that conſiders only the former, may as well entertain himſelf with a ſpelling-book.

26. WE muſt therefore keep our minds fixt and attent to what we read: 'tis a folly and lightneſs not to do ſo in human Authors; but 'tis a ſin and danger not to do ſo in this divine Book. We know there can ſcarce be a greater inſtance of contemt and diſvalue, then to hear a man ſpeak, and not at all mind what he ſaies: yet this vileſt affront do all thoſe put upon God, who hear or read his Word, and give it no attention. Yet I fear the practice is not more impious then it is frequent: for there are many that read the Bible, who if at the end of each Chapter they ſhould be call'd to account, I doubt they could produce very ſlender collections: and truly 'tis a ſad conſideration, that that ſacred Book is read moſt attentively by thoſe, who read it as ſom *preach the Goſpel*, Phil. 1. 15. *out of envy and ſtrife*. How curiouſly do men inſpect, nay ranſac and embowel a Text to find a pretence for cavil and objection, whilſt men who profeſs to look there for life and ſalvation, read with ſuch a retchleſs heedleſneſs, as if it could tell them nothing they were concern'd in: and to ſuch 'tis no wonder if their reading bring no advantage. God is not

not in this sense *found of those that seek him not*, Esai. 65. 1. 'tis Satans part to serve himself of the bare words and characters of holy Writ, for charms and amulets: the vertue God has put there consists in the sense and meaning, and can never be drawn out by drousy inadverting Readers.

27. THIS unattentiveness fore-stalls all possibility of good. How shall that convince the understanding, or perswade the affections, which do's not so much as enter the imagination. So that in this case the seed seems more cast away then in any of those instances the parable gives, *Mat. 13.* In those it still fell upon the soil, but in this it never reaches that; but is scatter'd and dissipated, as with a mighty wind, by those thoughts which have prepossess'd the mind. Let no man therefore take this sacred Book into his hand, till he have turn'd out all distracting phancies, and have his faculties free and vacant for those better objects which will there present themselves. And when he has so dispos'd himself for attention, then let him contrive to improve that attention to the best advantage.

28. TO which purpose it may be very conducive to put it into som order and method. As for instance, when he reads the doctrinal part of Scripture, let him first and principally advert to those plain Texts which contain the

the neceſſary points of Faith: that he may not owe his Creed only to his education, the inſtitution of his Parents or Tutors; but may know the true foundation on which it is bottom'd, *viz.* the word of God, and may thence be able to juſtify his Faith: and as Saint *Peter* exhorts, be ready to give an anſwer to *every man that asks him a reaſon of the hope that is in him*, 1 Pet. 3. 15. For want of this it is, that Religion ſits ſo looſe upon men, that every wind of doctrin blows them into diſtinct and various forms; till at laſt their Chriſtianity it ſelf vapors away and diſappears.

29. BUT let men be careful thus to ſecure the foundation, and then 'twill be commendable in them (who are capable of it) to aſpire to higher degrees of ſpeculation: yet even in theſe it will be their ſafeſt courſe chiefly to purſue ſuch as have the moſt immediat influence on practice, and be more induſtrious to make obſervations of that ſort, then curious and critical remarks, or bold conjectures upon thoſe myſteries on which God has ſpread a veil.

30. BUT beſides a mans own particular collections, it will be prudence in him to advantage himſelf of thoſe of others, and to conſult the learned'ſt and beſt expoſitors; and that not only upon a preſent emergency, when he is to diſpute a point, (as moſt do)

but in the conſtant courſe of his reading, wherein he will moſt ſedatly, and diſpaſſionatly judg of the notions they offer.

31. As to the choice of the portions of Scripture to be read in courſe, tho I ſhall not condemn that of reading the whole Bible in order, yet 'tis apparent that ſom parts of it (as that of the Levitical Law) are not ſo aptly accommodated to our preſent ſtate, as others are; and conſequently not ſo edificatory to us: and therefore I cannot ſee why any man ſhould oblige himſelf to an equal frequency in reading them. And to this our Church ſeems to give her ſuffrage; by excluding ſuch out of her public Leſſons. And if we govern our privat reading by her meſures, it will well expreſs our deference to her judgment; who has ſelected ſom parts of Scripture, not that ſhe would keep her children in ignorance of any, but becauſe they tend moſt immediatly to practice.

32. Neither will the daily reading the Scripture in the rubricks order, hinder any man from acquainting himſelf with the reſt. For he may take in the other parts as ſupernumeraries to his conſtant task, and read them as his leiſure and inclination ſhall promt. So that all the hurt that can accrue to him by this method, is the being invited to read ſomtimes extraordinary proportions.

33. If it be objected, that to thoſe who daily

daily hear the Church Service, 'twill be a kind of tautology, firſt to read thoſe Leſſons in privat, which ſoon after they ſhall hear read publicly, I anſwer that whatever men may pleaſe to call it, 'twill really be an advantage: For he that ſhall read a chapter by himſelf with due conſideration, and conſulting of good Paraphraſts, will have div'd ſo far into the ſenſe of it, that he will much better comprehend it when he hears it read: as on the other ſide, the hearing it read ſo imediatly after will ſerve to confirm and rivet the ſenſe in his mind. The one is as the conning, the other the repeating the Leſſon; which every Schole-boy can tell us is beſt don at the neareſt diſtance to each other. But I ſhall not contend for this, or any particular method; let the Scriptures be read in proportion to every mans leiſure and capacity, and read with attention; and we need not be ſcrupulous about circumſtances, when the main duty is ſecur'd.

34. BUT as in the doctrinal, ſo in the preceptive part, there is a caution to be us'd in our attention. For we are to diſtinguiſh between thoſe temporary precepts that were adapted to particular times and occaſions, and ſuch as are of perpetual obligation. He that do's not this may bring himſelf under the Jewiſh Law, or believe a neceſſity of ſelling all and giving it to the poor becauſe 'twas

Chriſts command to the rich man; Mat. 19. or incur other conſiderable miſcheifs.

35. THUS frequently commands are put in comprehenſive indefinite words, but concern only the Generality to whom the Law is written; and not thoſe who are entruſted with the vindication of their contemt. Accordingly 'tis ſaid, *thou ſhalt not kill*, Mark. 10. 19. which concerns the private perſon; but extends not to the Magiſtrate in the execution of his office, who *is a revenger* appointed by God, *and bears not the ſword in vain*, Rom. 13. 4. So the injunction not *to ſwear at all*, Mat. 5. 34 refers to the common tranſactions of life; but not thoſe ſolemn occaſions where an oath is to give glory to God, *and is the end of all ſtrife*, Heb. 6. 16. Yet theſe miſtakes at this day prevail with Anabaptiſts and Quakers, and bottom their denial of the Magiſtrates power to protect his Subjects by war; and to determin differences in Peace, by the oath of witneſſes in judicial proceedings.

36. THERE is another diſtinction we are to attend to; and that is between abſolute and primary commands, and ſecundary ones: the former we are to ſet a ſpecial remark upon, as thoſe upon whoſe obſervance or violation our eternal life or death inſeparably depends. And therefore our firſt and moſt ſolicitous care muſt be concerning them. I mention this, not

not to divert any from aſpiring to the higheſt degrees of perfection: but to reprove that prepoſterous courſe many take, who lay the greateſt weight upon thoſe things on which God laies the leaſt; and have more zeal for oblique intimations, then for expreſs downright commands; nay think by the one to commute for the contemt of the other. For example, faſting is recommended to us in Scripture, but in a far lower key then moral duties: rather as an expedient and help to vertue, then as properly a vertue it ſelf. And yet we may ſee men ſcrupulous in that, who ſtartle not at injuſtice, and oppreſſion (that clamorous ſin that cries to heaven) who pretend to mortify their appetites by denying it its proper food, or being luxurious in one ſort of it; and yet glut their avarice, eat up the poor, *and devour widows houſes*, Mat. 23.

37. To ſuch as theſe 'twould be good advice to fix their attention on the abſolute commands, to ſtudy moral honeſty, and the eſſentials of Chriſtianity; to make a good progreſs there, and do what God indiſpenſably requires: and then it may be ſeaſonable to think of voluntary oblations: but till then they are ſo far from homage, that they are the moſt reprochful flattery; an attemt to bribe God againſt himſelf; and a ſacrilege, like that of *Dionyſius*; who took away *Apollo's*

Io's golden robe, and gave him a ſtuff one.

38. THE ſecond thing requiſit in our reading is application: this is the proper end of our attention: and without this we may be very buſy to very little purpoſe. The moſt laborious attention without it, puts us but in the condition of thoſe poor ſlaves that labor in the mines: who with infinit toil dig that ore of which they ſhall never partake. If therefore we will appropriate that rich treſure, we muſt apply, and ſo make it our own.

39. LET us then at every period of holy Writ, reflect and look on our ſelves as the perſons ſpoke to. When we find *Philip* giving baptiſm to the Eunuch upon this condition that he *believe with all his heart*, Act. 8. let us conſider that unleſs we do ſo; our baptiſm (like a thing ſurreptitiouſly obtain'd) conveis no title to us; will avail us nothing.

40. WHEN we read our Saviours denunciation to the Jews, *except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh*; Lu. 13. 5. we are to look on it as if addreſt immediatly to our ſelves; and conclude as great a neceſſity of our repentance. In thoſe black catalogues of crimes which the Apoſtle mentions, 1 *Cor.* 6. 10. and *Gal.* 5. 19,20,21. as excluding from the Kingdom of heaven, we are to behold our own guilts arraign'd, and to reſolve that the ſame crimes will as certainly ſhut heaven gates againſt us, as thoſe to whom thoſe Epiſtles were imme-

immediatly directed. In all the precepts of good life, and Chriſtian vertue, we are to think our ſelves as nearly and particularly concern'd, as if we had bin Chriſts Auditors on the Mount. So proportionably in all the threats and promiſes we are either to tremble or hope, according as we find our ſelves adhere to thoſe ſins or vertues to which they are affixt.

41. THIS cloſe application would render what we read operative and effective, which without it will be uſeleſs and inſignificant. We may ſee an inſtance of it in *David*; who was not at all convinc'd of his own guilt by *Nathans* parable (tho the moſt appoſite that was imaginable) till he roundly appli'd it, ſaying, *thou art the man*: 2 Sam. 12. And unleſs we treat our ſelves at the ſame rate, the Scripture may fill our heads with high notions, nay with many ſpeculative truths, which yet amounts to no more then the Devils theology, *Ja. 2. 19.* and will as little advantage us.

42. IT now remains that we ſpeak of what we are to do after our reading; which may be ſumm'd up in two words: Recollect and practice. Our memories are very frail as to things of this nature. And therefore we ought to impreſs them as deep as we can, by reflecting on what we have read. It is an obſervation out of the Levitical Law, that thoſe

thoſe beaſts only were clean, and fit for ſacrifice, *that chew'd the cud*, Lev. 11. 4. And tho the ceremony were Jewiſh, the moral is Chriſtian, and admoniſhes us how we ſhould revolve and ruminate on ſpiritual inſtructions. Without this what we hear or read ſlips inſenſibly from us, and like letters writ in chalk, is wip't out by the next ſucceeding thought: but recollection engraves and indents the characters in the mind. And he that would duly uſe it, would find other manner of impreſſions; more affective and more laſting, then bare reading will leave.

43. We find it thus in all Sciences: he that only reads over the rules, and laies aſide the thoughts of them together with his Book, will make but a ſlow advance; whileſt he that plods and ſtudies upon them, repetes and reinforces them upon his mind, ſoon arrives to an eminency. By this it was that *David* attaind to that perfection in Gods Law as to out-ſtrip his teachers, *and underſtand more then the Ancients*, Pſal. 119. 99, 100. becauſe it was his *meditation* as himſelf tell us, *ver. 97. 99.*

44. Let us therefore purſue the ſame method; and when we have read a portion of Scripture, let us recollect what obſervable things we have there met with: what exhortations to vertue, or determents from vice; what promiſes to obedience, or menaces for the contrary: what examples of Gods vengeance.

geance againſt ſuch or ſuch ſins, or what inſtances of his bleſſing upon duties. If we do this daily, we cannot but amaſs together a great ſtock of Scripture documents, which will be ready for us to produce upon every occaſion. Satan can aſſault us no where, but we ſhall be provided of a guard, a *Scriptum eſt*; which we ſee was the ſole armor the captain of our ſalvation us'd in his encounter with him, *Mat. 4. ver. 4. 7. and 10.* and will be as ſucceſsful to us, if we will duly manage it.

45. THE laſt thing requir'd as conſequent to our reading, is practice. This is the ultimate end, to which all the fore-going qualifications are directed. And if we fail here, the moſt aſſiduous diligence in all the former will be but loſt labor. Let us mean never ſo well, attend never ſo cloſe, recollect never ſo exactly; if after all we do not practice, all the reſt will ſerve but to enhance our guilt. Chriſtianity is an active Science, and the Bible was given us not merely for a theme of ſpeculation, but for a rule of life.

46. And alas, what will it avail us that our opinions are right, if our manners be crooked? When the Scripture has ſhew'd us what God requires of us, nay, has evinc'd to us the reaſonableneſs of the injunctions, the great agreeableneſs which they have to the excellency of our nature: and has backt this with

the aſſurance that *in keeping of them there ſhall be a great reward*, Pſ. 19. 11. if in the midſt of ſuch importunate invitations to life we will chuſe death; we are indeed *worthy*, as the wiſe man ſpeaks, *to take part with it*, Wiſ. 1. 16. our crimes are hereby increas'd to a monſtrous bulk, and alſo depriv'd of that veil and ſhelter which darkneſs and ignorance would have given them. And a vicious Chriſtian may have cauſe at the laſt day to wiſh that he had ſtudied the Alcoran rather then the Bible. His ſenſualities might then have pleaded, that they were but the anticipating his Paradice, taking up that before hand, which his Religion propos'd to him as his *ſummum bonum*, his final and higheſt aim. But with what confuſion muſt a Chriſtian then appear, whoſe inſtitution obliges him to mortify the fleſh: and yet has made it the buſineſs of his life, not only to ſatisfy, but even to enrage, and enflame its appetites? that has ſet up a counter-diſcipline to that of the Goſpel he profeſſes; and when that requires auſterities and ſelf-denials, to reduce corrupt nature to a tameneſs and ſubjection; has not only pull'd off the bridle, but us'd the ſpur; contriv'd Arts to debauch even corruption it ſelf; and has forc'd his reluctıng nature upon ſtudied and artificial leudneſs? Such men may be thought to have read the Scripture with no other deſign but to be ſure to

run

run counter to it; that by informing themſelves of Gods will, they may know the more exactly how to affront and contradict it.

47. NAY, ſo it is, too many unto malice add contemt; are not content only ſullenly to reſiſt its Precepts, but deſpiſe and revile them alſo; arraign the wiſdom of God, and pronounce the divine Laws to be weak and impertinent; lay their Scenes of ridiculous mirth in the Bible; rally in the ſacred Dialect, and play the Buffoons with the moſt ſerious thing in the world. An impious licentiouſneſs which is now grown to that height, that it is one of the wonders of Gods long-ſuffering, that there are not as many eminent inſtances of the vengeance, as there are of the guilt. I have formerly complain'd of it, and muſt ſtill crave leave to do ſo. It is indeed ſo ſpreading an infection, that we can never be ſufficiently arm'd againſt it. Som degrees of it have tainted many who have not utterly renounc'd their reverence for the Bible: there being thoſe who in their ſolemn moods own it as Gods word, and profeſs they muſt finally ſtand or fall by its verdict; who yet in their jocular humors make light and irreverent applications of its phraſes and ſentences, furniſh out their little jeſts in its attire, and uſe it as if they thought it good for nothing elſe.

48. AND certainly this abuſe in men that own the Bible, is infinitly more monſtrous

then in thoſe who defy it: the later look on it as a common thing, and uſe it as ſuch: but for thoſe who confeſs it ſacred, thus to proſtitute it, is a flat contradiction as much againſt the rules of Diſcourſe as Religion: 'tis to offer the ſame abuſe to Chriſt in his Word, which the rude ſoldiers did to his perſon; to bow the knee before it, and yet expoſe it as an object of ſcorn and laughter. But ſure there cannot be two things more inconſiſtent, then the avowing it to be dictated by God in order to the moſt important concern of man, and yet debaſe it to the vileſt purpoſes; make it the drudg and hackney to our ſportful humors, and bring it out as the Philiſtims did *Samſon*, only to make us merry, *Jud. 16. 25.*

49. INDEED one would wonder how that ſhould become a proper inſtrument for that purpoſe, that thoſe doctrins of righteouſneſs, temperance and judgment to come (every where ſcatter'd thro that Book) which ſet heathen *Felix* a trembling, ſhould ſet Chriſtians a laughing: and yet ſhould men cite the ſame things and phraſes out of another Author, there would be no jeſt in it. It ſeems therefore that the ſpirit and eſſence of this ſort of wit lies in the profaneneſs. How abſurd is it then for men that do not utterly abjure Religion, to affect this impious ſort of raillery, which has nothing but daring wickedneſs

edneſs to recommend it? For certainly, of all the waies of diſcourſe that ever pretended to wit, this has the leaſt claim to it.

50. WHAT ſtrength of reaſon, or height of phancy is there, in repeting of phraſes and fragments of Books, when what they would ſay, they might much more properly expreſs in their own words? In any other inſtance but this of the Bible, it would paſs rather for a defect then an exceſs of wit. But that which I ſuppoſe renders it ſo taking, is, that it is the cheapeſt expedient for men to arrive to that reputation. Men that cannot go to the coſt of any thing that is truly ingenious, can by this means immediatly commence wits; if they can but charge their memories with half a dozen Texts, they need no other furniture for the trade: theſe mangled and tranſpoſed, will be ready at all turns, and render them applauded by thoſe who have no other meſure of wit, but its oppoſition to Piety. But would God, men would look a little before them, and conſider what the final reckoning will be for ſuch divertiſements; and if the whole world be an unequal exchange for a ſoul, what a miſerable Merchant is he that barters his for a bald inſipid jeſt? ſuch as a ſober man would avoid were there no ſin in it.

51. I know men are apt to flatter themſelves, that theſe lighter frolics will paſs for nothing,

nothing, ſo long as they do not ſeriouſly and maliciouſly oppoſe Gods word: but I fear they will find God in earneſt, tho they be in jeſt. He that has *magnified his Word above all things*, Pſal. 138. 2. cannot brook that we ſhould make it vile and cheap, play and dally with it. And if it were a capital crime to convert any of the perfume of the Sanctuary to common uſe, *Ex. 30. 32.* can we think God can be pleas'd to ſee his more ſacred Word, the theme of our giddy mirth, and have his own words echoed to him in profane drollery?

52. BUT beſides 'tis to be conſider'd that this wanton liberty is a ſtep to the more ſolemn and deliberate contemt of Gods word: cuſtom do's ſtrangely preſcribe to us; and he that a while has us'd any thing irreverently, will at laſt bring his practice into argument, and conclude that there is no reverence due to it. God knows we are naturally too apt to ſlight and eaſy apprehenſions of ſacred things; and had need to uſe all Arts and Inſtruments to impreſs an awe upon our minds.

53. IT will ſure then be very unſafe for us to trifle with them, and by ſo undue a familiarity draw on that contemt which we ſhould make it our care to avoid. The wiſe man ſaies, *he that contemns ſmall things, ſhall fall by little and little*, Eccl. 19. 1. And tho no degree of irreverence towards God or his Word,

Word, can be call'd a ſmall thing abſolutely conſider'd, yet comparatively with the more exorbitant degrees it may: and yet that ſmaller is the ſeed and parent of the greateſt. It is ſo in all ſins, the kingdom of Satan, like that of God, may be compar'd to *a grain of muſtard ſeed*, Mat. 13. 31. which tho little in it ſelf, is mighty in its increaſe.

54. NO man ever yet began at the top of villany, but the advance is ſtill gradual from one degree to another; each commiſſion ſmoothing and glibbing the way to the next. He that accuſtoms in his ordinary diſcourſe, to uſe the ſacred Name of God with as little ſentiment and reverence, as he do's that of his neighbor or ſervant; that makes it his common by-word, and cries Lord and God upon every the lighteſt occaſion of exclamation or wonder, this man has a very ſhort ſtep to the uſing it in oaths, and upon all frivolous occaſions; and he that ſwears vainly, is at no great diſtance from ſwearing falſely. It is the ſame in this inſtance of the Scriptures: He that indulges his wit to rally with them, will ſoon come to think them ſuch tame things that he may down-right ſcorn them: And when he is arriv'd to that, then he muſt pick quarrels to juſtify it, till at laſt he arrive even to the height of enmity.

55. LET every man therefore take heed of ſetting ſo much as one ſtep in this fatal circle;

circle; guard himſelf againſt the firſt inſinuation of this guilt: and when a jeſt offers it ſelf as a temtation, let him balance that with a ſober thought, and conſider whether the jeſt can quit the coſt of the profanation. Let him poſſeſs his mind with an habitual awe, take up the Bible with ſolemner thoughts, and other kind of apprehenſions then any human Author: and if he habituate himſelf to this reverence, every clauſe and phraſe of it that occurs to his mind, will be apter to excite him to devout ejaculations then vain laughter.

56. IT is reported of our excellent Prince, King *Edward* the ſixth; that when in his Council Chamber, a Paper that was call'd for happen'd to lie out of reach, and the Perſon concern'd to produce it, took a Bible that lay by, and ſtanding upon it reacht down the Paper: the King obſerving what was don, ran himſelf to the place, and taking the Bible in his hands, kiſſed it, and laid it up again. Of this it were a very deſirable moral, that Princes, and all perſons in autority, would take care not to permit any to raiſe themſelves by either a hypocritical or profane trampling upon holy things. But beſides that, a more general application offers its ſelf; that all men of what condition ſoever, ſhould both themſelves abſtain from every action that has the appearance of a con-

contemt of the holy Scripture; and alſo when they obſerve it in others, diſcountenance the inſolence: and by their words and actions give Teſtimony of the veneration which they have for that holy Book, they ſee others ſo wretchedly deſpiſe.

57. BUT above all let him who reads the Scripture ſeriouſly, ſet himſelf to the practice of it, and daily examin how he proceds in it: he that diligently do's this, will not be much at leiſure to ſport with it: he will ſcarce meet with a Text which will not give him cauſe of reflection, and provide him work within his own breſt: every duty injoin'd will promt him to examin how he has perform'd; every ſin forbid, will call him to recollect how guilty he has bin, every pathetic ſtrain of devotion will kindle his zeal, or at leaſt upbraid his coldneſs: every heroic example will excite his emulation. In a word, every part of Scripture will, if duly appli'd, contribute to ſom good and excellent end. And when a thing is proper for ſuch noble purpoſes, can it be the part of a wiſe man to apply it only to mean and trivial? Would any but an Idiot waſt that Soveraign Liquor in the waſhing of his feet, which was given him to expel poiſon from his heart? And are not we guilty of the like folly when we apply Gods word to ſerve only a ludicrous humor: and make our ſelves merry with that which was deſign'd for the moſt

ſerious and moſt important purpoſe; the ſalvation of our ſouls. And indeed who ever takes any lower aim then that, and the vertues preparatory to it in his ſtudy of Scripture, extremely debaſes it.

58. LET us therefore keep a ſteady eie upon that mark, and preſs towards it as the Apoſtle did; *Phil.3.14. walk by that rule* the holy Scripture propoſes; faithfully and diligently obſerve its precepts, that we may finally partake its promiſes. To this end continually pray we in the words of our holy mother the Church unto Almighty God, who has caus'd all holy Scripture to be written for our learning; that we may in ſuch wiſe hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that by patience and comfort of his holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold faſt the bleſſed hope of everlaſting Life, which he has given in our Savior Jeſus Chriſt.

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